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**The War on Corruption in Nigeria:
Framing Through the Eyes of Journalists**

A thesis submitted to the University of Kent for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Journalism

Fatima Iyabo Abubakre

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ABSTRACT

Corruption has thrived for decades in Nigeria, from military to democratic rule. As a highly contested topic in society and among individuals and groups across party lines and states, the need for urgent and collective action to curb corruption has been recognised. This explains why the masses voted for Muhammadu Buhari, who has a reputation for disliking corruption. This generous approbation of what he can do and matters arising from it are often covered in mainstream newspapers in Nigeria, which this research is based on.

The landmark 2015 general elections in Nigeria were dominated by national issues related to corruption, particularly from the top. A former president, Goodluck Jonathan, was quoted as saying that stealing public funds did not amount to corruption. His successor, Buhari, was elected on the strength of an anticorruption campaign, which enabled him to defeat a sitting president for the first time in the nation's history. The objective of this thesis is to examine the role of the media under a government that champions anticorruption. It asks the following question: Is the contemporary journalistic landscape in Nigeria corrupt? The study attempts to address this question by examining some media outlets' ambivalent attitudes. Specifically, it investigates how journalism professionals in mainstream media organisations contextualise the fight against corruption in Nigeria. In addition, it unearths the challenges that they encounter when transforming corruption stories into news and examines the impact of ownership on their job.

This research was conducted along two lines. The first involved an analysis of the content of mainstream news outlets, specifically how they present specific corruption cases related to the three levels of government: the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches. Framing theory was used to guide the research. Following an inductive approach, seven frames emerged from the analysis of news content on corruption: justice, corruption, democracy/rule of law, witch-hunting, morality/hypocrisy, disaffirmation, and defence/excuse. Over time, these frames served as lenses through which members of the public thought about and evaluated the government's anticorruption efforts.

The second line of research consisted of interviews with journalism professionals. The empirical evidence generated in this study reveals that the anticorruption crusade is skewed. This is the most notorious feature of the Buhari government's efforts to combat corruption against the backdrop of ethnoreligious nationalism. To forestall intolerance and curb hatred among citizens of the world's most populous Black nation, this research proposes ways for journalism professionals to look beyond the smokescreen of ethnoreligious and centralised fiscal conditions created by elite actors, which detract from the key issue of making the Nigerian political system work for the majority of citizens. Beyond this, journalists should focus on the menace of corruption, which has impeded the country's progress. Among other difficulties, access to information constitutes a major challenge for journalists who cover corruption. Contrary to popular belief, journalists who are in a managerial position affirm that the media has cooperated with the government's anticorruption campaign.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband, Abdur-Razaq “Deremi—my sponsor, my motivator, my chief promoter, and critic. Again, you have made me better than when you met me. I thank you. I also dedicate this work to our son, Abdus-Samad Adeleke, for your patience and understanding whenever I say, “Mummy is busy.” You are both the reason why I try to be better every single day. Glory be to God, the Almighty, who alone is perfect.

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CHAPTER 1

1.0 Introduction

This section covers context, background, and scope for the study. It explains the focus of the research, highlights the problems to be addressed, and lays out the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The urgent issue of corruption in Nigeria

In 2016, David Cameron, the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, was seen by some critics as having nearly committed a diplomatic gaffe while speaking at an event to mark the 90th birthday celebration of Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. Cameron referred to Nigeria, whose president, Muhammadu Buhari, was due to participate at an anticorruption summit in the UK, as a “fantastically corrupt”¹ country along with Afghanistan. Although this point was not well-received by many Nigerians, it was widely acknowledged as true (Abati 2016). Buhari did not dispute Cameron’s assertion; rather, he lent credence to it and noted that he would not demand an apology. As though a concealed sarcasm or is it a double entendre, he noted that he would not relent until all the wealth stolen from Nigeria and kept in Britain was recovered.² This is in keeping with the African maxim that a thief is not as guilty as the person who keeps a stolen good. This shift in blame has become somewhat of a pattern in the opinion of a Guinean sociology professor named Amadou Douno. He criticised the president of France, Emmanuel Macron, who had previously been reticent about European financial support to Africa.³

¹ At this meeting, the archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said after Cameron’s statement, “But this particular president [Buhari] is not corrupt . . . he’s trying very hard.”

² *Metro* reported on June 4, 2019 that 211 million pounds (equivalent of 82 billion naira) were seized 21 years after the death of a Nigerian military head of state, General Sani Abacha. Part of it had been used. See Hartley-Parkinson, R. (2019) Nigerian dictator’s £211,000,000 seized from bank account in Channel Islands retrieved from <https://metro.co.uk/2019/06/04/nigerian-dictator-211000000-seized-bank-account-channel-islands-9797935/>

³ See How Africa News retrieved from <https://howafrica.com/this-guinean-sociologist-response-to-frances-emmanuel-macron-is-thought-provoking/>

Corruption is a pressing issue in Nigeria, and it is a topic that many citizens often talk about and recognise the need to combat.⁴ It is a significant problem that has undermined the development of the country since it gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960. Corruption is undoubtedly a major problem in Nigeria given that the majority of citizens have directly experienced its negative effects. Resources intended for infrastructure development are frequently diverted to private coffers by public officials and politicians who are entrusted with the nation's collective wealth. Ibrahim Magu, the former acting chairman of one of Nigeria's major anticorruption agencies, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, noted that at least 1.3 trillion naira, the equivalent of nearly £3 billion British pounds, was stolen by 32 entities, including private individuals and organisations, between 2011 and 2015 under the watch of the last president, Dr Goodluck Jonathan. He added the following:

One third of this money, using World Bank rates and cost, could have comfortably been used to construct well over 500km of roads; build close to 200 schools; educate about 4,000 children from primary to tertiary levels at N25million per child; build 20,000 units of two-bedroom houses across the country and do even more.

The cost of this grand theft, therefore, is that these roads, schools, and houses will never be built, and these children will never have access to quality education because a few rapacious individuals had cornered for themselves what would have helped secure the lives of the future generations, thereby depriving them of quality education and healthcare, among others.⁵

In 2016, 2017, and 2018, Nigeria placed 136th, 148th, and 144th, respectively, out of 180 countries on Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perception Index. The late Kofi Annan, a former secretary-general of the United Nations, lamented the negative outcomes of

⁴ See '8. President Muhammadu Buhari: My plan to fight corruption in Nigeria' In *Against Corruption: a collection of essays*' 12 May 2016, Policy Paper retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/against-corruption-a-collection-of-essays/against-corruption-a-collection-of-essays>

⁵ Magu: Over N1.3trn was stolen under Jonathan. [online] Available at: <http://www.thecable.ng> [Accessed 25 Mar. 2019]

corruption, including aiding terrorism, conflicts, and organised crime. He stated that corruption “erodes public trust, hurts investment and undermines democracy, and the rule of law.”⁶ According to TI, “Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.”⁷ Rick Stapenhurst described corruption as “the abuse of public power for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance”⁸ (Stapenhurst, 2000, p.1). In Nigeria, corruption is a prevalent phenomenon and has attendant negative consequences. It allows those entrusted with power or position to steal the nation’s commonwealth. Thus, corruption in Nigeria, as can perhaps be said is the case all over the world, can be defined as the abuse of office for personal gain.

Mbaku (1998) distinguished between political corruption and bureaucratic corruption. While the former consolidates politicians’ grip on power and curtails threats posed by the incumbent’s competitors, the latter enables public officials to skim off the bureaucratic system in the allocation and distribution of resources (Mbaku, 1998, p.121). Within this framework, journalists who cover corruption stories constantly crisscross between these two social categories of corruption. This is because politicians are expected to benefit not only themselves but also their immediate constituencies (Joseph, 1987), which have provided them with political support. In addition, civil servants often see public office as a quick path to enrich themselves.

In an ethnographic account of the dynamic relationship between corruption and culture, Daniel Jordan Smith (2007) wrote that one runs the risk of blaming

⁶ Annan, K. (2003). Statement On the Adoption by The General Assembly of The United Nations Convention Against Corruption. [online] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Retrieved from <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/background/secretary-general-speech.html>

⁷ See Transparency International website, “What is corruption?” <https://www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption>

⁸ Stapenhurst, R. (2000). *The Media’s role in curbing corruption*, WBI Working papers Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Nigerian “culture and, by extension, Nigerian people for the corruption that plagues their society.” Similarly, he observed that Nigerian culture “is as much a ‘culture against corruption’ as it is a ‘culture of corruption’” (p.6). Indeed, Pierce (2016) noted that the use of the term “corruption” in Nigeria lies at the crux of how “moral questions about the distribution of public goods are negotiated” (p.4). Smith further highlighted that the perception of corruption among Nigerians goes far beyond the abuse of state power for private gain to include a whole range of social behaviours in which various kinds of morally questionable deception are employed to achieve wealth, power, or prestige (p.6).

The concept of accountability is entrenched in conversations on corruption. The Cambridge Dictionary defines accountability as “the fact of being responsible for what you do and able to give a satisfactory reason for it, or the degree to which this happens.”⁹ In essence, accountability refers to when an individual or an entity entrusted with responsibility is measured against that responsibility with a view to ascertaining whether they have done what they are supposed to do and in the way they are supposed to do it. It relates to the degree to which such individuals or entities are able to give credible reasons for their actions in public office. Therefore, the anticorruption crusade is related to the demand for accountability from those entrusted with the keys to the nation’s vault.

Democracy is the main form of governance that supports the fundamental value of accountability. Nigeria is a liberal democracy, and the country’s constitution acknowledges the media’s significant role in highlighting the government’s responsibility and accountability to citizens.¹⁰ Indeed, except for the media, the Constitution of Nigeria does not mention any other

⁹ See Cambridge Dictionary, retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accountability>

¹⁰ Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) recognizes the important role played by the mass media in Nigerian society: “The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at

occupation that is charged with this important responsibility. In addition, since journalism aims to enhance the quality of democratic citizenship and governance, the focus of this research which is to examine how media practitioners participate in the mediatisation of corruption and the crusade against the scourge is significant.

1.2. Locating the study in the contemporary Nigerian setting

With a population exceeding 200 million people and a large economy, Nigeria is often referred to as “the Giant of Africa.” With over 500 ethnic groups and 300 languages, Nigeria is generally divided into the northern and southern regions. Many ethnic groups live in different geopolitical zones of the country. The Hausa-Fulani ethnic majority is concentrated in the northern region, where the predominant religion is Islam. The northern region can be divided into three geopolitical areas: North West, which mainly consists of Hausa-Fulani with Muslim beliefs; North Central, which mainly consists of the Tiv, Idoma, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups and various minorities with Muslim or Christian beliefs; and North East, which mainly consists of Hausa-Fulani, the Kanuri, and other minority groups with Muslim or Christian beliefs.

The southern part of Nigeria comprises three geopolitical zones. The South West, where most of Yoruba live, is the only zone that is nearly evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. The South East is predominantly home to the Igbo ethnic group, who are mainly Christians. Finally, the South South zone is an oil-rich region that sustains Nigeria’s economy and is home to many mostly Christian ethnic minorities. This thesis examines how these different geopolitical and ethno-religious divisions influence the practice of journalism.¹¹

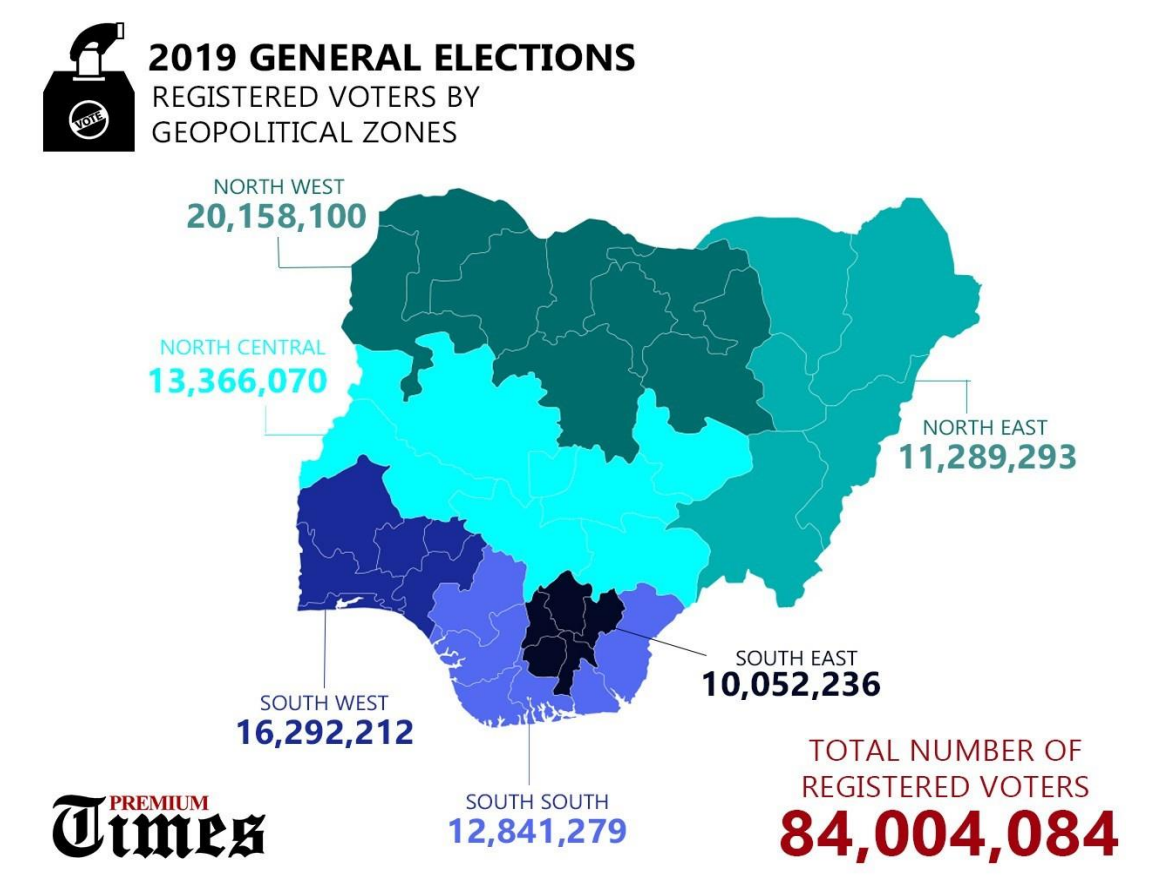
To effectively cover Nigeria, media outlets require extensive human labour, as the country currently consists of 36 states and the national capital, Abuja, which nearly has the same status as a state. According to an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) breakdown of

all times, be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people” (FRN, 1999, p.8).

¹¹ This topic is further discussed in Chapters 8 and 9 of the thesis.

registered voters in the 2019 general elections, northern Nigeria alone had a total of 44,813,463 voters, who represented around 53% of the country’s 84,004,084 registered voters.

Figure 1



Map of registered voters in Nigeria by geopolitical zone in the lead-up to the 2019 general elections¹²

1.3. Historical antecedents of corruption in Nigeria

1.3.1 Precolonial and independence era

The Berlin Conference (1884–1885) aimed to establish an agreement on colonisation and trade in Africa between the European powers. At its conclusion, Britain was allocated certain regions including present-day

¹²Retrieved from *Premium Times*, 2019 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/features-and-interviews/312927-the-key-figures-that-matter-in-nigerias-2019-general-elections.html>

Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and part of Cameroon in West Africa. At the time, the British were primarily concerned with preventing intrusions from the French and the Germans.

Consequently, a charter was granted to the Royal Niger Company to establish a protectorate. This provided the foothold that enabled Britain to establish control over the territory now known as Nigeria (see Uzoigwe, 1976; Hargreaves, 1984). By 1900, the charter had been cancelled, and a royal protectorate was declared. Through it, the Northern Region was governed through indirect rule. The Southern Region, on the other hand, was governed through direct rule.

This governance style of indirect rule was introduced under the leadership of the British soldier and explorer Sir Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, who was charged with “strict instructions to avoid unnecessary military conquest” (Pierce, 2016). This was because “British taxpayers were unenthusiastic about subsidising new African colonies even while appreciating the glory of imperial possession” (Pierce, 2016, p.34).

However, in 1903, following the conquest and annexation of emirates in Sokoto and parts of the Borno region in northern Nigeria by colonialists, who “were determined to make names for themselves as heroes of the British empire by presiding over imperial expansion” (p.35), the administrative reorganisation of the northern territory began along provinces, divisions, and districts during the early years of colonial rule. This led to the introduction of new forms of bureaucracy that were alien to the natives’ cultures.

Pierce noted that discourses of corruption originated in the colonial period, as officials who had hitherto been compensated through tax revenues from the people, became “salaried employees of government.” These salaries were fixed subject to:

British officers’ assessments of individual officeholders’ job descriptions rather than through indigenous conceptions of rank and propriety. This resulted in a situation where ‘the use of office for ‘personal’ ends counted as corruption (2016, p.37).

This early incidence of corruption may have formed the kernel of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the masterpiece novel by renowned Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. Easily one of the most widely read books in modern African literature, the novel centres on Okonkwo, a strong man whose cultural values clash with the arrival of aggressive, proselytising European missionaries in Igbo land. While he is in exile, Okonkwo’s friend, Obierika, visits Okonkwo and briefs him about events at home:

“It is already too late” said Obierika sadly. “Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia, we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring soldiers, and we would be like Abame.” He paused for a long time and then said: “I told you on my last visit to Mbanta how they hanged Aneto.”

“What has happened to that piece of land in dispute?” asked Okonkwo.

“The white man’s court has decided that it should belong to Nnama’s family, who had given much money to the white man’s messengers and interpreter.”

“Does the white man understand our custom about land?”

“How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad, and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.” (Achebe, 1958, p.57)

Nevertheless, under colonial rule, corruption was perceived as an African attribute and often used as a political weapon against officials or local leaders who were uncooperative, vulnerable, or viewed as a liability to the interests of British colonial rulers. It is important to note that little appears to have changed about this insinuation or perspective. According to Mlada Bukovansky (2006), “by linking the problem of corruption to the problem of underdevelopment, advanced industrial countries implicitly and unjustifiably claim the moral high ground for themselves and ascribe to the developing world the status of the moral reprobate” (p.198).

Returning to the issue at hand, the Niger and Benue Rivers are two major rivers which facilitated trade to the coastal south of northern Nigeria. By 1914, the southern and northern protectorates were amalgamated to form present-day Nigeria for economic reasons that would benefit European trade and commerce. The name “Nigeria” originates from the “Niger area,” which was coined by Flora Shaw, a journalist who later became Lugard’s wife.

1.3.1.1. The interplay between corruption and the quest for independence in the press

A considerable body of literature focuses on the origins of the newspaper industry, which predates the formation of Nigeria itself. The early press was linked to the activities of proselytising Christians and liberated slaves connected with the British antislavery movement (Omu, 1967; Oduntan, 2005). The missionaries introduced Western-

style education in southern Nigeria, which underpinned the formation of a colonial government.

Nigeria's first indigenous newspaper in the vernacular

Nigeria's first newspaper, *Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba* ("Newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba"), was published in Yoruba. It was established in Abeokuta in November 1859 by Henry Townsend of the Christian Missionary Society and was largely dedicated to promoting Christian evangelism and the education of the local people (Abubakre, 2004).¹³ *Iwe Iroyin* reported news from Abeokuta, Lagos, and other parts of Yorubaland. Oduntan noted that the newspaper provided commercial information for trading routes along the Atlantic coast. This enabled European and African traders "to know what was most in demand, what to trade in, and what to produce" (Oduntan, 2005, p.300).

With an estimated daily readership of 300, the newspaper's sale price of 120 cowries was not enough to sustain it. Subsidies from London were needed to pay staff and missionaries. The eventual choice of Lagos, which is located around 80 km from Abeokuta, as the colonial headquarters contributed to the newspaper's demise. Following a political crisis in Egbaland, it ceased publication in 1867 after eight years of existence. Nevertheless, *Iwe Iroyin* served a useful purpose, as local people and early nationalists realised that the newspaper could function not only as a medium of literacy, enlightenment, and entertainment but also as a potent

¹³ Missionaries also sought to convert natives from African traditional religious practices to Christianity and, by implication, welcome them to civilisation.

political weapon that would enable them to actively participate in governance and the determination of affairs in their own land (Omu, 1967).

Participation by nationalists

It is important to acknowledge the critical role of nationalism and nationalist leaders in the development of the media in Nigeria.

Paraphrasing Williams Hachten, Idemili (1978) noted that

to study either nationalism or the press in British West Africa is to study the other. The press, [William Hachten] says, gave to nationalism its prime means of diffusion, the medium through which the idea could be disseminated. Similarly, nationalism gave to the press its *raison d'etre*, in extending its circulation. (Idemili, 1978: 85)

There was a marked antipathy between the Colonial Office, which was saddled with articulating colonial policies and entrenching the imperial hegemony of the British Empire, and the young nationalists, who propagated anticolonial sentiments through the print media. The content of the latter created a lasting impression in the minds of the public.

Oso, Odunlami, and Adaja (2011) submitted that, “with the death of Iwe Iroyin in 1867, the baton of newspaper ownership was passed on to the nascent educated elites, mostly descendants of ‘freed slaves.’” Such individuals included Herbert Macaulay, a prominent nationalist whose likeness is imprinted on Nigeria’s 1 naira coin.

Macaulay was born to the family of Thomas Babington Macaulay and Abigail Crowther in 1864. His parents were the children of slaves captured in present-day Nigeria and resettled in Sierra Leone by the British West

Africa Squadron. Macaulay and John Akilade Caulrick cofounded the *Lagos Daily News* in 1925, which helped to promote the cause of nationalism. The newspaper was later renamed *Nigerian Daily News* to emphasise its national outlook. Macaulay also formed Nigeria's first political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), which won elections to serve on the Legislative Council in the Lagos colony. He was also the founding president of the National Council of Nigeria Citizens and Cameroun (NCNC), which enjoyed a widespread support in Nigeria until 1964, when it merged with the Action Group (AG) to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and contest that year's general elections.

Through the print medium, Macaulay wrote opinion articles to oppose British rule. They were inimical to the interests of British colonialists, even as he exposed corruption in the handling of railway finances and ensured that the colonial government compensated local chiefs whose lands were forcefully taken. Macaulay's response to claims that the colonial government had the true interests of the natives at heart was as follows: "The dimensions of 'the true interests of the natives at heart' are algebraically equal to the length, breadth and depth of the white man's pocket."¹⁴ Due to the growing discontent between colonial administrators and locals, many other publications were also established around this period. Hence, the press served as an efficient tool for nationalists from the southern region to question oppressive colonialist policies, which justified the struggle for independence from British rule.

The introduction of Western education to northern Nigeria clashed with preexisting Arabic and Quranic education. This resulted in delays in the

¹⁴ See The Founding Fathers, retrieved from Leadership, <https://leadership.ng/2019/02/24/the-founding-fathers>.

development of nationalist movements in the north. As a result, the western and eastern parts of southern Nigeria were more Westernised in terms of education and media culture than their compatriots in the north. Thus, the northern region, which is larger than the western and eastern regions, was behind in terms of infrastructure development. Compensating for these shortcomings was why colonial officials were often seen as paternalist towards the Hausa-dominated Islamic north (see Chick 1996; Furniss, 2011; Bourne, 2015). In general, northern rulers deferred to the colonial masters, whom they trusted to help them develop the region, as in the south.

Macaulay's efforts served as a springboard for other notable Nigerian nationalists, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe,¹⁵ Obafemi Awolowo,¹⁶ and Tafawa Balewa.¹⁷ The *West African Pilot*¹⁸ was founded in 1937 by Azikiwe, an American-trained journalist who later became Nigeria's first ceremonial president from 1963 to 1966. Azikiwe also established *Daily Comet*, *Defender*, and *The Outlook*. However, it was the *West African Pilot* that had the greatest impact. Although Azikiwe admitted that he initially established these newspapers to be "economically secure and free from want,"¹⁹ their editorial policies and trends indicated support for a nationalist and anticolonialist cause. From the newspaper business, Azikiwe expanded into other commercial ventures, including the establishment of the African Continental Bank (ACB) in 1944.

Awolowo, a lawyer and Azikiwe's contemporary, also had journalism experience. He was a trainee reporter with the *Nigerian Daily Times* before establishing his own newspaper, the

¹⁵ Azikiwe was from the South East.

¹⁶ Awolowo was from the South West.

¹⁷ Balewa was from the northern region. He was Nigeria's first and only prime minister and was assassinated in a coup in 1966, six years after Nigeria gained independence.

¹⁸ Its motto was: "Show the light and the people will find the way."

¹⁹ See Azikiwe, N. (1970). *My Odyssey: An Autobiography*, London: C. Hust and Co. (p.286)

Nigerian Tribune, in 1949. It remains one of Nigeria’s oldest surviving private newspapers to date. Also known as “Zik,” Azikiwe was part of the Igbo ethnic group from the South East, while Awolowo (who was popularly addressed as “Awo” by his followers) was of Yoruba ethnic stock from southwestern Nigeria. Over the next three decades, both men played a critical role not only in the country’s development and political history but also in the growth of mass media infrastructure.

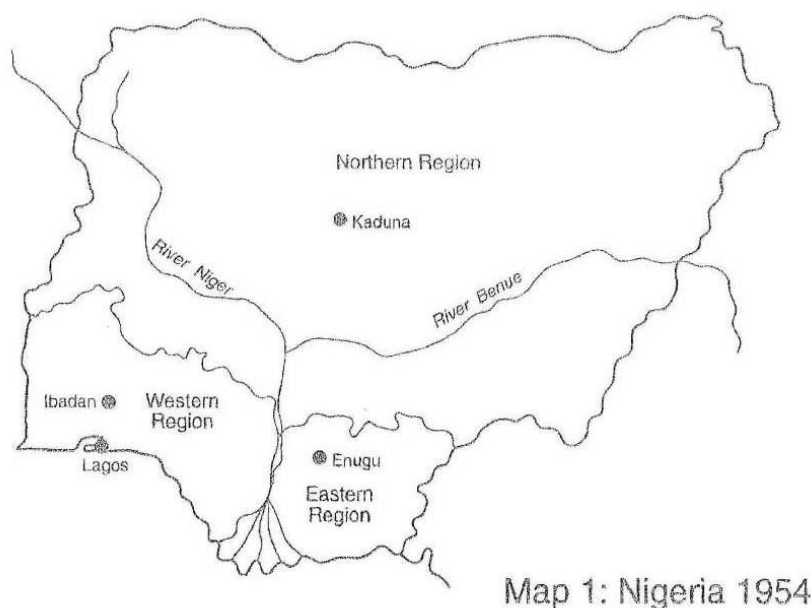


Figure 2: Historical map²⁰ of Nigeria that shows the three federal regions created under British colonial rule

Led by Balewa and Sir Ahmadu Bello, the founder and leader of the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC), northern politicians were displeased with southern media coverage of the north, which tended to portray it as “the backwaters of civilisation, wallowing in the stranglehold of an Islamic feudal system” (Kukah, 1996, p.135). This led to a call by members of the NPC and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) to establish a newspaper to

²⁰ Retrieved from Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue, Retrieved from http://www.waado.org/nigerian_scholars/archive/pubs/wilber1_map1.html

articulate and advocate for the region's interests. Thus, the first Hausa-language newspaper, *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*, was founded in 1939 (Daura, 1971, p.39; See also Furniss, 2011).

Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo not only provided favourable press for Bello (the *Sardauna* of Sokoto, a prestigious royal title in the Sokoto sultanate) and his peers, but it was also used as a medium to draw attention to pervasive acts of oppression and corruption perpetrated by aristocrats in the northern Nigerian emirate and to advocate for change and reform. Thus, the newspaper served as a forum for a discourse on corruption. By 1948, an English edition of the newspaper entitled the *Nigerian Citizen* was published. Following a reorganisation, it was renamed the *New Nigerian* around the independence period. In 1957, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) also established a Hausa radio service to address the dearth of information in the northern region, as a substantial part of the south could follow the BBC in English. In addition, those who were literate in Arabic in the north and in the southwest could listen to the BBC's Arabic broadcast (Abubakre, 2004).

It is worth noting that, when premiers of the western and eastern regions—led by Awolowo and Azikiwe, respectively—advocated for a transition to full independence in 1956 to achieve independence before Gold Coast (later renamed Ghana), representatives from the northern region felt that the call was premature and that more time was needed for the north to catch up with the south in terms of both human and material development. Waiting would also check the southern region's domination over the northern region regarding the distribution of white-collar jobs. Thus, northern representatives resisted Awolowo and Azikiwe's call for a rush to independence. Nevertheless, by the time Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, leaders of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria fiercely competed to outpace the others in terms of the development of their respective regions; control of the media was their main vehicle of power.

The above analysis shows that journalists-cum-nationalists collaborated in an anticolonial struggle to campaign against British rule around two to three decades before independence. However, the creation of the three federal regions brought about ownership and party loyalty and affiliation. Both Azikiwe and Awolowo were also indicted for acts of corruption between 1956 and 1962. They were both accused of enriching themselves and their political parties with proceeds from their corrupt practices.

In 1956, a panel of inquiry led by Justice Stafford Forster Sutton established that Azikiwe diverted resources from the Eastern Region Marketing Board to a bank²¹ where he had substantial interests and was a principal shareholder. Despite the indictment, “Azikiwe was not prosecuted, nor did his political career suffer” (Pierce, 2016, p.95). Azikiwe was removed from office by the colonial rulers due to this indictment. He had to face the electorate, who rather than reject him saw his removal as punitive. Thus, he gained sympathy votes and won more convincingly than hitherto. This shows the mindset of the electorate, which largely perceived Azikiwe’s removal as the region’s premier by colonial rulers as political persecution.

Similarly, a commission of enquiry led by Justice G.B. Coker indicted Awolowo for diverting funds from the Western Region Marketing Board into the coffers of his political party, the AG, during colonial rule. Oso et al. (2011, p.8-9) noted that both the “NCNC and AG kept their newspapers afloat through the remarkable support of the commercial banks (Africa Continental Bank (ACB) [in Zik’s case] and National Bank [in Awo’s case]) and other companies associated with their respective governments.” Pierce wrote,

It is striking that Awolowo’s reputation— very much in western Nigeria, but more broadly as well— was not seriously harmed by the condemnatory words of Justice Coker and his colleagues. However, one construes “corruption” as an activity or as a

²¹ African Continental Bank. According to the commission’s report, Azikiwe’s “conduct in this matter has fallen short of the expectations of honest, reasonable people” and “he was guilty of misconduct as a Minister” (Pierce, 2016).

charge, the memory of Obafemi Awolowo seems to be determined primarily by assessments of the goods he brought to his political constituencies. (p.99)

The scenario painted here by Pierce is not inexplicable in the case of Awolowo and indeed Azikiwe as well as the latter's political loyalist in the west. Such loyalist of Azikiwe was Adegoke Adelabu, who was also accused of financial wrongdoing; consequently, he was removed as a federal minister. The point to note about the foregoing is that in multiple contexts, cultural factors often determine the interpretation of corruption in terms of what type of corruption is considered as acceptable (or useful) by the public. For instance, anticolonial actors, irrespective of their questionable behaviour, were perceived by the masses as working in the public interest for political emancipation from British colonial rule. This situation, coupled with the delivery of public goods by Awolowo and Azikiwe for instance, would make it seem as though the society privileges corrupt acts with the unholy principle that the end justifies the means and not the other way around.

Thus, the public were not concerned about any indictments that the nationalist leaders may have received from the colonial masters. In Awolowo's case,²² the Coker inquiry on his activities under colonial rule took place in post-independence Nigeria. Thus, it was seen as a political vendetta by the federal government controlled by the NPC and its ally, S. Ladoke Akintola.²³ It is arguable that corruption here was employed to curtail threats posed by other competitive leaders like Awolowo, to the incumbent and the ruling political party.

In the northern region, the NPC did not experience significant dissonance or a split between its leaders and the colonial masters. This was due to the existence of the caliphate system in the region prior to colonial rule. This system was utilised to full advantage with British indirect

²² See the report from the Coker commission of inquiry into the affairs of certain statutory corporations in western Nigeria (1962).

²³ Akintola succeeded Awolowo as premier of the western region. Akintola had fallen out with his master, Awolowo (opposition leader), by aligning politically with the ruling government (NPC) at the centre. The Coker investigation was thus perceived as a political witch-hunt against Awolowo.

rule. However, an isolated case was that of Muhammed Sanusi, the Emir of Kano, who was removed due to allegations of financial impropriety and the battle for control between him and Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. As Osoba (1996) indicated, “there was no insider revelation of the goings-on in the northern Nigerian government, as the Eyo faction of the NCNC made before Foster-Sutton and the Akintola faction of the Action Group made before Coker” (p.375). However, Osoba’s opinion should be taken with a grain of salt because Aminu Kano of the Hausa Fulani was Azikiwe’s political ally, and Joseph S. Tarka of the Tiv in the Middle Belt²⁴ and Joseph Olawoyin of the Yoruba in the north were both loyal to Awolowo. Thus, all of these men opposed NPC rulers in their region.

1.3.2. Post-independence era

1.3.2.1 First military rule (1966–1979)

The fight against corruption led to the introduction of military rule in Nigeria. On January 15, 1966, a Nigerian military officer named Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu made a radio announcement to herald Nigeria’s first military coup and the establishment of a revolutionary council whose objective was to “establish a strong united and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife.” He said,

Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10%; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds.²⁵

Although it may seem apparent that the military employed the “fight against corruption” as a smokescreen to seize power from a democratically elected government, initial reports indicated

²⁴ The Middle Belt belongs to the North Central part of the northern part of Nigeria and a great deal of northern minorities live here.

²⁵ Siollun, M. (2009, p.55) citing New Soja Magazine 2nd Edition, 2005 In Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria’s Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)

that “Nzeogwu and his collaborators were hailed as national heroes” (Country Studies,²⁶ Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress) on account of “nationwide disillusionment with the corrupt and selfish politicians.” However, this populist adulation was short-lived because Nzeogwu and other Igbo officers engaged in killings of non-Igbo victims of the coup, which gave it a partisan appearance from which, contemporary events demonstrate that the country is yet to fully recover.²⁷

Those executed in the coup included Nigeria’s prime minister, Balewa; the premiers of the northern and western regions, Bello and Akintola; and the minister of finance, Festus Okotie-Eboh of the midwest, who represented the fourth region created after independence in 1963. He was killed as a non-Igbo from the region instead of Dennis Osadebey, premier of the Midwest region who was a western Igbo. In addition, senior military officers who were mainly of northern and southwestern ethnic stock were killed. However, Nzeogwu and his allies spared, among others, political leaders from the eastern region, such as Azikwe, the ceremonial president; Nwafor Orizu, the senate president; and Michael Okpara, the regional premier of the east.

Barely six months after Nzeogwu’s radio announcement, there was a counter coup spearheaded by northern military officials. This caused widespread riots and pogroms against the Igbos. To address this, the new military ruler, Yakubu Gowon, created 12 states from the country’s four existing regions.²⁸ Notably, three states were created for each of the major ethnic groups in the

²⁶ See Country Studies, Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, “The 1966 Coups, Civil War, and Gowon’s Government,” retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/70.htm>

²⁷ See Siollun, M. (2016) How first coup still haunts Nigeria 50 years on. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-35312370>

eastern region. This development led the military governor of the eastern region, Odumegwu Ojukwu, to call for secession from Nigeria to form the state of Biafra.

According to Osoba (1996), the Nigerian Civil War provided opportunities for unlawful enrichment, including the

misappropriation of the salaries and allowances of soldiers killed in action for several months by their commanders; the gross inflation of military procurement contracts; the payment of inflated contract fees several times for the same goods or services, or none at all; the looting of public and private properties in occupied territories by both the Nigerian and Biafran armies. The classic case was the looting of millions of pounds sterling from the Central Bank in Benin in 1968, a crime which both [the armies of Nigeria and Biafra] blamed on each other. (p.376)

During the conflict between the federal government and the “Biafrans” of the South East (1967–1970), the Nigerian media rallied round Gowon’s government by mobilising citizens to support the country’s unity. At the time, a media slogan associated the name “GOWON” with the phrase “Go On with One Nigeria.”²⁹ The post-war period was marked by Nigeria’s oil boom; the production and sale of crude oil led to an abundance of cash, while the low yield of cash crops led to the neglect of agriculture. This period led to the “resource curse” due to the ruling elites’ failure to effectively manage the wealth that accrued from the sales of natural resource for the overall benefit of society.

Although acts of corruption under Gowon’s military government were usually shielded from public view, an exception was a notable case in 1974 that received intense media coverage. It involved a businessman, Godwin Daboh, who was of the same ethnic group as a federal commissioner of transport, Joseph Tarka. In response to Gowon’s invitation to the public to expose corrupt public officers, Daboh swore to an affidavit accusing Tarka of corruption in a

²⁹ See Aziken, E. (2017) Gowon Going on with one Nigeria, retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/03/gowon-going-one-nigeria/>

Lagos high court on July 12, 1974.³⁰ The sustained media campaign³¹ generated by the case forced Tarka to resign from his position in the Gowon cabinet. However, the media accused Gowon of covering up the crime, as he did not fire him as required by international best practices. This incident, along with Gowon's revocation of his promise to transfer power to democratically elected civil leaders in 1976, marked the beginning of the end for his regime.

After seizing power from Gowon in a bloodless coup of July 30, 1975, General Murtala Muhammed's rule was cut short by his assassination on February 13, 1976 by Lt. Colonel Buka Suka Dimka. During Dimka's 198 days in office, he embarked on series of civil service reforms. His was seen as a corrective regime. Of the 12 military governors who worked with his immediate predecessor and were investigated in 1975 by the Federal Assets Investigation Panel,³² 10 were found to have enriched themselves through corrupt acts while in office. They were subsequently dismissed, and properties in excess of their earnings were forfeited to the federal government. Furthermore, numerous media reports focused on the 10,000 public officials and employees who were forced to retire on account of "age, health, incompetence, malpractice or corruption" within the civil service. Falola and Heaton (2008) indicated that, although "Muhammed has been revered since as the most qualified and best-intentioned ruler in Nigerian history . . . many believe his near-mythical status owes significantly to the fact that he did not live long enough to have his reputation tarnished" (p.xxviii). Conversely, analysts believe that killing him in spite of and possibly because of his glaring stance against corruption contributed to the thriving of the Nigerian albatross, which is systemic corruption.

³⁰ See Renaissance Progressive Initiative, "Tarka Vs Daboh" retrieved from <http://rpirekindled.blogspot.com/2016/12/tarka-vs-daboh.html>

³¹ The *Daily Times of Nigeria* highlighted this as a top issue. See Olumhense, S. (2017) A kleptocracy overruns a democracy, *The Punch*, December 17, 2017, Back page, retrieved from <https://punchng.com/a-kleptocracy-overruns-a-democracy/>

³² See Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1976, March). Federal military government's views on the Report of Federal Assets Investigation Panel. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information: Printing Division. Also See Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1978, March). Federal military government's views on the Report of Federal Assets Investigation Panel, Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information: Printing Division, Lagos.

Muhammed was succeeded by his chief of staff, Supreme Headquarters and his second-in-command in the military hierarchy, General Olusegun Obasanjo. He served as Nigeria's head of state from February 13, 1976 to October 1, 1979. He later became the country's democratically elected president from May 29, 1999 to May 29, 2007, serving two terms with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Obasanjo continued Muhammed's policies and fulfilled the military's pledge to transfer power to a democratically elected government. In this case, he handed over to a former schoolteacher named Alhaji Shehu Shagari who was elected on the platform of the National Party of Nigeria. The media claimed that Obasanjo, who was the director of the Army Engineering Corps and later the federal commissioner for works, played a key role in the cement ships armada scandal³³ at the Lagos seaport under the Gowon administration, which stifled Nigeria's external trade and economy (Marwah, 2018).

A panel was convened to investigate Obasanjo's role in the scandal. He was absolved of any wrongdoing by Justice S. M. Belgore's panel of enquiry, which had been established by Obasanjo's boss, Murtala Muhammed. However, the report received relatively little media coverage because it was not made available to the public:

The only evidence made available to the public was the Government's white paper on the report in which it was sanctimoniously stated that the Commission had cleared Obasanjo of any wrongdoing . . . The white paper did not reveal the evidence on the basis of which he was cleared by the panel of inquiry of any wrongdoing. (Osoba, p.379)

Contrary to Osoba's position, a report by *The New York Times* stated that Obasanjo was absolved because "the first cement contract was signed more than two months after he had left

³³ Following the oil boom, the military government embarked on massive infrastructural projects across the country. This occasioned a high demand for cement which was short domestically. The negotiations to purchase cement internationally resulted in an oversupply of highly expensive cement from all parts of the world, overstressing the capacity of Nigeria's main port in Lagos.

his position as inspector of engineers in the army.”³⁴ Thus, it became obvious that a report could not have been made public if Obasanjo was not in office when the wrongdoing took place.

Furthermore, Osoba offered some reasons why critics perceived the fight against corruption under the Muhammed/Obasanjo regime as phoney. A notable among suggestion was the relationship between the late Muhammed and M. K. O. Abiola,³⁵ acting on behalf of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp (ITT), Abiola secured governmental contracts worth millions of United States dollars for his company and himself. The deal was opposed on technical and professional grounds by the director-general of the Post and Telegraph Department of the Ministry of Communication, who was compulsorily retired, along with many others, within the first three months of Mohammed regime as head of state. Another factor that cast the Obasanjo government in a negative light was the high inflation of Nigeria’s external debts through heavy borrowing at high interest rates during the oil boom and debts owed to foreign and local contractors. Nevertheless, Obasanjo has remained influential in national politics (Iiffe, 2011).

Although some of Osoba’s assertions may be correct, many cannot be conceded. Abiola, a chartered accountant employed by the University of Lagos Teaching Hospital, made, and won a bid for ITT. It was viewed a disservice by critics for a Nigerian director of P and T to kick against this achievement of Abiola. On one hand, the director should protect his discipline by stating facts as they are. On the other hand, critics construed his criticism of Abiola as capable

³⁴ See Darnton, J. (1976) Nigerians Fear New Revelations in Cement Scandal, New York Times, June 28, 1976, retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/06/28/archives/nigerians-fear-new-revelations-in-cement-scandal.html>

³⁵ Moshood Kashimawo Abiola was a Nigerian politician and philanthropist from the South West. He presumably won the 1993 presidential elections, but the results were annulled by the military president, Ibrahim Babangida. He was later arrested by the military for treason and died unexpectedly in detention. Abiola is widely seen as a symbol of democracy in Nigeria.

of robbing a Nigerian of the chance to win the contract. As for heavy borrowing during Muhammed and Obasanjo's regimes, achievements in infrastructure and the expansion of tertiary education during this period lent credence to the government's spending and foreign borrowing from an economic perspective. Nevertheless, Obasanjo disliked debt; as a democratically elected president (1999–2007), he negotiated with the Paris Club and secured a debt cancellation for Nigeria's external borrowing.³⁶

1.3.2.2 Brief democratic rule and second military rule (1983–1999)

Under Alhaji Aliyu Usman Shagari's civilian government (1979–1983), corruption reappeared. Although Shagari was known for his modest lifestyle, he failed to curb the excesses of his ministers, especially with regard corruption. As Toyin Falola indicated, Shagari presided over “a corrupt and ineffective government that hastened Nigeria's economic decline.” However, one man who played a notable role in this administration was Umaru Abdulrahman Dikko, Shagari's brother-in-law and the minister of transport. He was also appointed chairman of the presidential taskforce on rice due to low agriculture production; as a result, there was a need to import the commodity. However, rice failed to reach the markets because it was diverted to warehouses owned by Dikko, then sold at exorbitant prices on the black market. Unsold grain was used as an incentive for voters to support the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in electoral campaigns, especially in areas dominated by the opposition; the election was widely acknowledged as rigged in favour of a second term for Shagari (Hart, 1993, p.403). Tension increased in Nigeria; as in the past, the military led a coup on 31 December 1983, which installed Muhammadu Buhari as head of state.

³⁶ See BBC News Channel (2005) “Nigeria to get \$18bn debt relief” June 30, 2005. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4637395.stm>

The Buhari-Idiagbon regime of 1984–1985 gained a reputation for battling corruption and indiscipline. However, it also issued harsh decrees to check the press and stifle public opinion, which led the government to gradually lose popularity among citizens, especially in a period when Nigeria's foreign reserves could no longer support imports. Initially, the regime lamented, “our leaders revel in squandermania, corruption and indiscipline; and continue to proliferate public appointments in complete disregard of our stark economic realities”³⁷ (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985, cited in Osoba, 1996). Thus, the regime investigated many politicians, many of whom were jailed for enriching themselves with the nation's collective wealth. Nevertheless, it is to the credit of this regime that public morality and discipline increased among the people³⁸. However, due to the Buhari regime's failure to tackle economic challenges inherited from the Shagari government, it was toppled in a bloodless military coup that led General Ibrahim Babangida to become head of state on August 27, 1985.

Popularly called “IBB,” Babangida ruled Nigeria from 1985 to 1993. Upon entering office, he immediately released all those who had been jailed for corruption under the previous regime, restored free speech by cultivating the Nigerian press, and promoted human rights. However, these measures served as a smokescreen for the wide-scale corruption that would subsequently take place and become deeply entrenched in the Nigerian polity. Osoba indicated,

It would appear that the widespread and systematic use of corrupt means by IBB to “settle” many actual and potential critics rested on the impeccable presupposition that if he corrupted enough Nigerians, there would be nobody to speak out on the issue of corruption or public accountability and so the matter would disappear conveniently from the national agenda. To some extent the strategy worked as many university professors and other academics, leaders of the main professions, leading trade unionists, top clerics and evangelists and the shakers and movers of the “organised private sector” of the national economy scrambled to jump on the Babangida regime's gravy train. Babangida established innumerable commissions, directorates, centres, bureaux, task forces, committees etc. with open-ended budgets, woolly and

³⁷ The speaker, General Sani Abacha, was speaking on behalf of the Nigerian military on this occasion. Abacha's tenure as military head of state from 1993 to 1998 gave Nigeria's corruption scourge a global outlook because it represented the largest case of known government corruption during that period. See Pallister, D. & Capella, P. (2000). ‘British banks to freeze dictator's millions’ *The Guardian* [Online]. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2IB1k20>

³⁸ Citizens learnt to queue and take turns in public spaces.

indeterminate agendas and arbitrary powers to accommodate his multitudinous army of cronies, lackeys and opportunists. (1996, p.382)

Under Babangida's regime, the authority of the Central Bank of Nigeria was severely undermined. It was placed under the authority of Babangida's office, which means that the 12.4 billion dollars that accrued from Nigeria's oil resources could not be fully accounted for. The government was indicted by Pius Okigbo, an economist who chaired the panel of inquiry on the Gulf War oil windfall. Furthermore, Babangida's government adopted the structural adjustment programme (SAP) advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which devalued the national currency and allowed it to float against the United States dollar. In addition, government-owned companies were traded off to regime cronies. Furthermore, Babangida's annulment of the 1993 elections, which were won by Abacha, hastened his exit from power, as many saw it as the most transparent election in the history of Nigeria. Babangida, due to public resentment of the annulment of Abacha's emergence as winner was compelled to establish an interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan, which was declared illegal in a court of law.

General Sani Abacha took over the leadership of the government on November 17, 1993. Under his rule, corruption assumed an international dimension. The International Centre for Asset Recovery stated that Abacha and his family embezzled public funds that amounted to 4 billion U.S. dollars. After his sudden death in June 1998, he was succeeded by Abdulsalami Abubakar, who began investigating corruption perpetrated under Abacha's rule. The "Abacha loot" was held in accounts in Abacha's name and those of his family members and associates. In addition, it was scattered in international banks around the world, with over 650 million dollars hidden in Switzerland alone. This represents the largest embezzlement in Swiss financial history. Similarly, the United States government froze 458 million dollars in assets from the Abacha

loot. Under Abacha's rule, the Nigerian media faced its most turbulent period; many outlets adopted an activist stance, and many journalists were interrogated, detained, or killed.

There were insinuations from critics that Abubakar enriched himself through corruption during his 11 months in office.³⁹ In 1999, national elections were held and won by Obasanjo, who ran under the PDP; he was sworn in as president on May 29 of the same year. Abubakar was also mentioned in the Halliburton bribery scandal, in which a consortium of international companies bribed Nigerian government officials with 180 million dollars to win contracts for oil and gas projects in the petroleum sector.

1.3.2.3 First phase of return of democratic rule (1999–2015)

Obasanjo's democratically elected government (1999–2007) also had to contend with pervasive corruption. It established two major agencies, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), to handle corruption cases in Nigeria. Notable cases include the prosecution and conviction of the police inspector general, Tafa Balogun, who stole 20 billion naira (the equivalent of 150 million pounds) and the firing of the education minister, Fabian Osuji, and the housing minister, Mobolaji Osomo. However, Obasanjo's critics accused him of using the EFCC as a political tool to conduct a witch-hunt of political opponents who were against his reelection bid for a third term. One example is the acrimonious dispute between Obasanjo and the erstwhile vice-president, Atiku Abubakar, over allegations of corruption between 2005 and 2007. Obasanjo was also accused of presiding over what many considered

³⁹ This was mainly a result of the depletion of Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves from 6.7 billion dollars in 1998 under Abacha to 4 billion dollars at the end of March 1999 and the report by the commission of inquiry led by Christopher Kolade and established by Obasanjo to review contracts awarded under the Abubakar military government. As a result, 1,684 out of 4,072 contracts were recommended for cancellation and some were renegotiated.

to be the most flawed elections in the nation's history in his bid to install his handpicked successor, Umaru Yar'Adua.

Yar'Adua succeeded Obasanjo as president in 2007 and spent three years in power before his death on May 5, 2010. Upon assuming office, Yar'Adua declared his wealth, which was a rare act among Nigerian leaders. Acknowledging the deeply flawed elections that brought him to power, Yar'Adua said,

If we will be honest with ourselves, we all know how we rig elections in this country, we compromise the security agencies, we pay the electoral officials and party agents while on the eve of the election we merely distribute logistics all designed to buy the vote. (Adeniyi, 2011, p.107)

Under his leadership, Nuhu Ribadu (the chairman of the EFCC), who had made significant progress in the fight against corruption, was demoted and eventually forced to vacate office, which gradually decreased the intensity of the fight against corruption. Yar'Adua suffered prolonged kidney-related ailments, which impacted his performance in office and eventually led to his death. This paved the way for the vice-president, Goodluck Jonathan, to be sworn in as president.

Under Jonathan (2011–2015), Nigeria earned its highest revenues from oil. Jonathan granted a presidential pardon to officials who had been convicted of corruption, which sent a negative signal to the rest of the world. He also fired the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, who raised the alarm that 20 billion dollars in oil revenue had not been remitted by the state-owned oil company Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to the federal account.⁴⁰ Corruption during Jonathan's administration was so pervasive that *The Economist* referred to the president as “an ineffectual buffoon who let politicians and their

⁴⁰ Channels TV report (February 14, 2014) Sanusi Insists \$20 Billion Oil Money is Missing' retrieved from <https://www.channelstv.com/2014/02/14/sanusi-insists-20-billion-oil-money-is-missing/>

cronies fill their pockets with impunity.”⁴¹ By the time the next elections were held, Jonathan had become unpopular. When he lost his re-election bid in 2015, Jonathan said that it was “the will of God that the election went the way it did.”

1.4 Second phase of democratic rule with change as slogan

1.4.1. Fight against corruption under the Buhari administration (2015–2019)

The Buhari administration came into power largely on the strength of a campaign message of change, which was anchored by an anticorruption war. The success of Buhari’s political party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), at the polls was novel. This was the first time that an opposition political party would clinch power at the federal government level since Nigerian independence. This victory was significant, as Nigeria had achieved sovereignty after British colonial rule in 1960 (Owen and Usman, 2015). Thus, the democratic change occasioned by Buhari’s victory could be likened to a political rupture which gave rise to new divisions of power and expectations.

There were high expectations of Buhari, as many Nigerians perceived him as an austere, honest, and patriotic leader. He was even viewed as a messiah, particularly among supporters in the North West geopolitical zone (where Buhari hails from). Among other promises, Buhari pledged to “prevent the abuse and misuse of Executive, Legislative and Public Offices, through greater accountability, transparency, strict and implementable anticorruption laws, through strengthening and sanitising the EFCC and ICPC as independent entities.”⁴²

⁴¹ See The Economist ‘Crude tactics’ June 30, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/01/30/crude-tactics>

⁴² Vanguard Newspaper, May 28, 2015 ‘What Buhari promised Nigerians’ retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/05/what-buhari-promised-nigerians/>

The anticorruption agencies inherited by the Buhari administration were the ICPC, the EFCC and the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB). Each was strengthened through due budgetary allocations and the appointment of men and women of impeccable character. Viewing all these anticorruption agencies that have been for over a decade and half before his coming to office as inadequate to combat corruption effectively, the Buhari administration introduced a whistleblower policy in December 2016, which pledged a reward worth 2.5% to 5% of funds recovered by the Nigerian government to whistle-blowers.

Executive Order 6 was another measure introduced by Buhari's government. It aims to bar individuals being tried for corruption from travelling outside of Nigeria to prevent them from absconding and/or accessing properties located outside the country and suspected of holding proceeds from corruption. A third measure was Executive Order 8, which aimed to tackle tax evasion and money laundering (among other issues) through the Voluntary Offshore Assets Regularisation Scheme with a period of grace attached to it beyond which there will be sanction. Finally, a fourth measure was the full implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA), which was conceived but not implemented by Jonathan's administration.

As president, Buhari took nearly six months to appoint members of his cabinet. Meanwhile, he directly took charge of Nigeria's petroleum ministry, which had largely been associated with pervasive corruption. Furthermore, Buhari established the Presidential Advisory Committee on Anticorruption (PACAC). It was led by a respected jurist, Professor Itse Sagay. The committee formed the intellectual component of the anticorruption campaign. Similarly, Buhari established a committee to investigate the procurement of arms to combat the Boko Haram insurgency; it revealed that huge sums of money had been diverted to fund the re-election campaign of his immediate predecessor, Jonathan.

By 2016, Nigeria's economy was in a deep recession. In addition, there was widespread job loss and a drastic fall in global oil prices. By this time, citizens were becoming impatient. Religious groups urged Nigerians to exercise patience with the Buhari government, while the organised labour urged him to alleviate poverty. Although Buhari demonstrated strong political will to tackle corruption (many Nigerian elites had been arraigned in the courts, and some were compelled to return huge sums of money), many of his critics alleged bias in the anticorruption war (Akinkuotu, 2018). They indicated that once a politician decamped to the ruling party, his sins were "automatically forgiven."⁴³ In addition, Buhari's former secretary to the Government of the Federation, Babachir Lawal, was indicted for corruption; his prosecution by the EFCC began only two years after his indictment.

In an April 2019 BBC *HARDtalk* interview with Zeinab Badawi, Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian Nobel laureate in literature and critic of several Nigerian governments, indicated that Buhari had nevertheless "scored a pass" on the issue of fighting corruption. He said, "I frankly despise those who try to trivialise [an anticorruption campaign] in Nigeria simply because they don't like the face of the man who is behind it or because he has failed in certain other respects." Furthermore, he noted that "it is no longer business as usual"⁴⁴ because bankers, legislators, and former governors were now standing trial for corruption.

During the four consecutive times (2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015) that Buhari contested for the highest office in the land, the sitting president continued to emphasise the fight against corruption as a major campaign promise. In addition, as president, he was the key protagonist in the fight against corruption in the country. The media focuses on this as a public policy,

⁴³ The chairman of the ruling political party (the APC), Adams Oshiomole, was quoted as follows: "once you join the APC, your sins are forgiven." *The Punch*, January 18, 2019, retrieved from: <https://punchng.com/oshiomhole-once-you-join-the-apc-your-sins-are-forgiven/>

⁴⁴ See *HARDtalk* with Wole Soyinka- Nobel Literature Laureate retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0004gb4/hardtack-wole-soyinka-nobel-literature-laureate>

devoting ample space and airtime to covering corruption. While key officials in the Buhari government proclaimed that the fight against corruption was successful, the administration's opponents consistently described it as a failed policy and a political witch-hunt of the government's perceived enemies.

Given the significance of the news media as a platform for the communication of information and the analysis of public policies, it is worth mentioning that journalists' framing of a policy issue such as anticorruption can either facilitate or hinder its success. Traditionally, journalists convey factual and objective information about events that happen in society. Indeed, Cohen (1963) underscored the role of the journalist as an "informer."

Studying the role of journalists in an anticorruption campaign is central to our understanding of their role in the public reform process. On one hand, they can produce and establish the salience of information that can engender norms of public accountability among political actors. On the other hand, they can produce information that places value on sustaining the perpetuation of corrupt acts by deviants. It is within such discourses that journalistic roles and identities are "reproduced and contested" (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017).

The criticism levied against the media⁴⁵ in relation to its role in the Buhari government's anticorruption efforts comprises the focus of the present thesis, which asks the overarching research question "How do Nigerian journalists frame the war on corruption under the Buhari government?" It explores the conditions under which they mediate the crusade against corruption.

⁴⁵ This was during the 68th general assembly of the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON).

1.5. Research Focus

The central aim of this thesis is to probe the role of mainstream print media in the fight against corruption under the current government of Nigeria, which came into power on the strength of an anticorruption campaign in 2015. It examines news frames employed by Nigerian journalism professionals to contextualise the government's anticorruption crusade. Buhari's main selling point in the build-up to the 2015 general elections was this anticorruption campaign, which enabled him to defeat a sitting president for the first time in the nation's history (Abubakre, 2017).

The researcher's quest to serve the public interest is a cornerstone in the development of this thesis. The study investigates how journalists cover the major issue of political corruption, which has been identified in the literature as the bane of the Nigerian political system (Bamidele, Olaniyan and Ayodele, 2016, Page, 2018). By necessity, the fight against corruption is associated with demands for public accountability and is a significant component of democracy, in which journalism plays a critical role. In other words, fighting corruption may be viewed as an important element of democratic reform, particularly because it is steeped in the discourse on legal and moral dimensions that play out against the backdrop of Nigerian culture.

Since this research examines the conditions associated with publicity on the Nigerian government's anticorruption crusade, it also serves a critical function by focusing on the challenges that journalists may face in the coverage and production of corruption-related news under a government that champions anticorruption. The latter point is especially significant because, by attempting to link the work of journalism professionals with the products that they create, the current research underlines factors at play in the frame-building process of news coverage of corruption.

Silvio Waisbord (2013, p.155), a professor of media and public affairs, stated that journalism professionals' beliefs "are certainly important to assess desirable ideals of journalism, yet they cannot be studied disconnected from the broad institutional dynamics." Therefore, this thesis helps to broaden the perspective on journalistic practice in Nigeria. Its theoretical approach helps to extend framing theory, especially in a non-Western framework, as it focuses on Nigeria. Therefore, it expands the research agenda beyond Western-based scholarship.

1.6. Justification for the research and contributions to knowledge

An important aim of this thesis is to offer an authoritative assessment of the role of journalism in the public reform process in a non-Western context and to serve as a key resource on this topic for scholars. Examining journalists' role in the coverage of political corruption stories and the challenges that they face in their work underscores and reveals the media's possibilities and limits in the fight against corruption, which can only be explained in relation to the socio-cultural context under which journalism is practiced. The foregoing is important for a developing country such as Nigeria, which has gained a negative reputation for corruption around the world.

Although the study of corruption and its consequences has been a point of convergence in many lines of inquiry, including in economics, sociology, political science, law, anthropology, and health (Gillespie & Okruhlik, 1991; Osoba, 1996; Smith, 2007; Ogundiya, 2009; Yusuf, 2011; Akanle and Adesina, 2015; Bamidele, Olaniyan and Ayodele, 2016; Pierce, 2016; Lewis, 2019), few studies have discussed the role of journalism in this regard—at least not through the lens of journalists who cover corruption stories and bear witness on behalf of citizens, particularly in a non-Western context.

Mark Deuze (2005) highlighted the dominant journalistic occupational ideology, which he defined as a shared system of beliefs among journalists. Through it, they

participate, negotiate, and connect with wider public interests and thereby justify their role in society. Scholars have also argued that the performative role of journalists is related to “the so-called ‘backstage’ of news production, that is, the negotiations with different reference groups, the search for sources and the verification process” (Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach, 2017, p.6), which influences their behaviour. Thus, it is important to interrogate journalistic roles within the confines of the war against corruption.

Available evidence shows that little attention has been paid to research on journalistic roles in Africa. For example, the book *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (2012) edited by David Weaver and Lars Willnat analysed the working conditions, social standing, and professional attitudes of journalists around the world. However, no study was conducted in Africa, which the editors admittedly regretted. It is only recently that African-oriented studies on journalistic roles have begun to gain ground, particularly the extensive studies conducted by Kioko Ileri on Kenyan journalists (Ileri, 2016; Ileri, 2017a; Ileri, 2017b; see also Mwesige, 2004 on Ugandan journalists and Ramaprasad, 2001 on Tanzanian journalists) in East Africa. In West Africa, other studies have examined topics such as perceptions of press freedom among journalists (Eribo and Tanjong, 1998).

Some Nigerian scholars have advanced several reasons for the media’s inability to meaningfully contribute to the eradication of corruption in the country. They have highlighted the absence of a socio-political ideology based on integrity and weak statutory and constitutional guarantees (Omojola, 2010). Others have emphasised the clientelist relationships and networks that exist between politicians and media owners (Yushau 2018;

Bourne, 2018). In addition, scholars have noted the relationship between journalists and their sources (Ciboh, 2017) in relation to corruption. These studies have been taken into account as beginnings to which new additions are made in this study.

Nevertheless, how journalism professionals cover stories about corruption is worth studying because it relates to values in society and offers a new perspective on how the Nigerian mainstream press presents corruption issues. Since enhancing the quality of democratic citizenship and governance is within the purview of journalism, the focus of this thesis is to examine the role of the press to assess whether journalism professionals have done what they are supposed to do in the task of examining and accurate reporting of the crusade against corruption in Nigeria during the period covered in this study.

This thesis argues that some media outlets in the Nigerian press tend to overlook corruption, which influences journalists' interpretation of the war against corruption. While the fight against corruption represents a vital component of Nigeria's political culture, the media seems unable to deliver on its obligations in the public sphere due to conditions introduced by religious and ethnic considerations.

The broader context of ethnoreligious and political positions is acknowledged, but they are not the only factors that shape the journalistic coverage of corruption cases. The factor of journalistic professionalism is key to the watchdog role of the media. This position is corroborated by the fact that no media outlet will condone corruption outright. Rather, voices for or against a particular corruption case may be louder in some cases and fainter in others, depending on the media outlet.

What is clear from our content analyses in Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and on interviews in Chapter Nine, does not reveal that the media is divided on ethnic and religious lines, but points to the fact that journalism culture in this environment manifests both libertarian and authoritarian tendencies at the same time and this is consequential for journalistic roles in covering corruption.

In the case of the arms deal presented in Chapter Five, newspapers were divided in their support of the fight against corruption and defence of the culprits. Regarding the judicial corruption case in Chapter Six, though all newspapers agreed that corruption should not be condoned, but five newspapers criticised the timing and procedure of the prosecution of the corruption case, while only one newspaper endorsed government action on the procedure, timing, and act of corruption itself. In the corruption case in the legislature presented in Chapter Seven, all six of the profiled newspapers unanimously supported the fight against corruption. This is because the legislature represents all regions of Nigeria; thus, the coverage was not framed along ethnic, religious, or political lines. The only dissenting voice in this case was the subtle condemnation of the whistle blower Abdulmumin Jibrin, who tried to portray himself as a saint after fully participating in the wrongdoing. In addition, his criticism by the media was further proof of journalists' commitment to fulfilling their watchdog role.

This thesis also examines the manner in which media practitioners have entrenched themselves in the nation's adversarial politics, the obstacles posed by judicial processes associated with the anticorruption crusade, and journalists' self-positioning as the guardians of democracy and human rights. This positioning has

implications for our understanding of the narratives surrounding the anticorruption crusade.

The works of journalism scholars such as Wolfgang Donsbach, Thomas Hanitzch, Tim Vos, and Claudia Mellado demonstrate the significance of research on journalistic roles in the academic literature. Besides from their basic obligation to inform the public, journalists perform a variety of roles, including the widely acknowledged watchdog role. It also subsumes the facilitative role as a platform for exchanges, debate, and development. Relevant also is the radical role as a critical advocate and the collaborative role support for State (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng & White, 2009). What is implicit in these roles is that they have helped to shape the field of journalism as a profession (Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach, 2017). Thus, key functions of journalism include ensuring public accountability and the overall development of society.

In addition to providing useful insights on journalistic practice in Nigeria, this thesis argues that journalists' mediative role in the war against corruption is tied to the country's political culture based on evidence drawn from content analyses and interviews with media professionals. Against the backdrop of the politics of succession and regime change in Nigeria, the discourse on the role of the media in the fight against corruption under the Buhari government is relevant and deserving of scholarly attention. Thus, this thesis is expected to contribute to knowledge in interrelated fields such as sociology, political science, religions, and history in the Humanities.

1.7. Research Framework

The researcher examined how journalism professionals mediate the war against corruption under the Buhari government in two important steps. The first step was to examine media

coverage of major corruption cases to establish how journalism professionals report these stories in practice. The corruption cases examined in this thesis are meant to illustrate how journalists cover corruption and, by extension, the Buhari government's anticorruption war. This is achieved through inductive content analysis of mainstream stories in daily newspapers.

The second step undertaken by the researcher was to interview journalists and editors who cover corruption to gather information and fill gaps in knowledge about how they contextualise the government's anticorruption efforts. The aim was to ascertain the challenges that they face in covering corruption and how the ownership of the media outlets chosen for this research impacted the coverage of corruption. In anticipation of getting its due at its appropriate place after the literature review, it is not a bad idea to mention in passing the three research questions formulated for this thesis.

1. What are the patterns of news coverage of corruption in the Nigerian press under the Buhari administration?
2. What challenges do Nigerian journalists face in reporting corruption stories under the Buhari administration?
3. How has ownership of the media impacted the coverage of corruption and anticorruption fight of the Buhari administration?

1.8. Scope of the Study

This study covers the period from Buhari's inauguration as president to the completion of his first term in office: May 29, 2015, to May 28, 2019. Thus, this research covers a period of four years. The major corruption cases considered in this thesis occurred in 2015, 2016, and in 2019.

1.9. Thesis Overview

The groundwork for this thesis was established with the previous sections, which examined the widespread nature of corruption in Nigeria and the role of the media in highlighting the government's responsibility and ensuring its accountability to the people, as enshrined in the country's constitution. The current chapter covers the antecedents of corruption from the precolonial period to the independence era, the military and postmilitary period, and the recent successful transition to a new government that has promised wide reforms, particularly with regard to anticorruption efforts. Furthermore, this chapter lays the foundations for exploring our understanding of journalistic roles to combat corruption.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review and provides the interrelationship of media systems, ideology, and the theoretical framework. It examines corruption and news values and discusses how journalism professionals might negotiate their roles within this discourse. Furthermore, it reviews relevant studies on media and corruption.

Chapter 3 offers a contextual overview of the Nigerian media industry's political economy and examines the history of its commercialisation and ownership under successive governments. It examines in-depth the challenges of circulation figures, the impact of technology, journalists' welfare, and managerial efficiency. It also provides a representative sample of mainstream news outlets for the present thesis and justifies their inclusion. Finally, it examines media accountability and its interplay with corruption.

Chapter 4 addresses the research design and methods used for the study against the backdrop of the research questions. It highlights and justifies the study area, methods, and procedures and presents the case studies used in the research. Throughout the latter, an assurance of fidelity is established through adherence to the University of Kent's code of ethical practice.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed account of how the news media reported on the issue of corruption in the executive branch of the government. It focuses on the arms deal fraud perpetrated in the office of the national security adviser under the leadership of Sambo Dasuki. Furthermore, the chapter examines patterns in the portrayal of key actors in the arms deal and the framing of the story and highlights the sources featured in news reports by the media outlets selected for this research.

Chapter 6 examines corruption in the judicial arm of the government. It examines the false declaration of assets by the former chief justice of Nigeria, Walter Onnoghen. The focus was on the newsworthiness of the issue, which was guided by the principle of selection. This was linked to the framing of the case in news reports.

Chapter 7 addresses corruption in the legislature by focusing on the budgetary appropriation process. It examines how six news outlets framed this issue. Based on the narratives presented in the three case studies, Chapter 8 argues that ethnoreligious factors, fiscal centralisation, and personalism played a major role in media coverage of corruption. The impact of these factors is more obvious in the analysis of news content than in the interviews, as many people accept the idea that Nigeria is a pluralist society where, in spite of difficulties caused by ethnoreligious conflicts, not all journalists would admit to working along ethnoreligious lines.

Chapter 9 contains an analysis of field interviews. It describes the data collection and research setting and procedures. This chapter presents the “what” of the government’s anticorruption efforts, as defined by government spokespersons. It also presents interviews with journalists, editors, and managerial staff at the media organisations chosen for this thesis. The chapter examines how journalists contextualise the government’s anticorruption efforts, the challenges

involved in the process, and the role of media proprietorship in reporting corruption issues. It also assesses journalists' reportage of political corruption in Nigeria.

Chapter 10 discusses the study's findings and their implications for society. It summarizes the research, presents contributions to knowledge, offers recommendations, and acknowledges the study's limitations.

CHAPTER 2

2.0. Literature Review

2.1. Media systems and the anticorruption crusade

Research has demonstrated the effects of a liberalised media system in checking corruption in society (Fell, 2005, Camaj, 2012). For example, Michael Schudson emphasised that, within the relationship between the media and the government, the media's responsibility is to reveal information that can make "powerful people tremble" (Schudson, 2008, p.14) using its investigative role. In this context, "powerful people" refers to members of the political class. However, the situation is more complicated in Nigeria and other African nations which lay claim to liberal democratic ideals but are unable to wholly abide by their key principles due to fierce competition over control for state power and, by implication, resources (Diamond, 1988, p.327). Hallin and Mancini (2004) contended that the evaluation of a media system must be rooted in a clear understanding of the dynamics of socio-political divisions. The current researcher recognises the important place that British colonialism occupies in Nigeria, given its strong imprint on Nigeria's media system from the very beginning. Therefore, this study privileges decoloniality. In the present day, a critical way of situating our understanding of the media system in Nigeria is through a study of news coverage of corruption, which raises important issues about the nature of Nigeria's media system and its professionalism.

Based on Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1956) *Four Theories of the Press*,⁴⁶ which has been widely acknowledged as laying the foundation for a scholastic line of inquiry on the media and media structures in society, the examination of media systems in communication studies has come a long way, given that it emerged as a fundamental element for explaining journalistic performance in diverse political cultures. An influential body of work has developed from the

⁴⁶ These four theories of the press—authoritarian, libertarian, Soviet-Communist, and social responsibility—largely draw from the landscape of the Cold War.

efforts of notable scholars such as Gurevitch and Blumler (1990, 1995); Hallin and Mancini (2004); and Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, and White (2009). In addition, Hallin and Mancini (2012) have made a more recent attempt to demystify the Anglo-western media paradigm, which has brought about different shades of themes.

Of these studies, Hallin and Mancini's (2004) critical analysis in *Comparing Media Systems* has gained the most momentum. The book focuses on the political context of the interrelationships between the media and the state; they are delineated under three paradigmatic models and four dimensions (i.e., media markets, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism, and the degree of state intervention) for comparison and interpretation. The three models are the North Atlantic or liberal model associated with the United States and Great Britain; the Central European or democratic corporatist model associated with Germany, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries; and the Mediterranean or polarised pluralist model associated with Greece, Spain, and Portugal.

Studies have examined the potential of Hallin and Mancini's framework by applying it to media systems in Africa, specifically South Africa (Hadland, 2007) and Ethiopia (Abebe, 2017). They attempt to extend academic debates on the relationship between media and the state, (Hadland, 2015, for instance). While these studies offer valuable insights on the similarities and dissimilarities in the three models, as applicable to the media systems of the two countries, they also prompt us to engage in a deeper reflection on critical issues such as profound ideological rivalries, which is an enduring feature of contemporary African society. For example, Hadland (2012, p.116) questioned the extent to which issues such as religion, ethnicity, and languages fit into with the three models described in Hallin and Mancini's framework.

The focus of the current thesis, corruption (and the anticorruption crusade), is a pervasive social phenomenon in the Nigerian public discourse. In fact, the country has earned an unenviable

global reputation for corruption due to the activities of some unscrupulous citizens who engaged in various fraudulent acts within and outside the country.

The Nigerian government's efforts to tackle corruption also encompasses an imperative to eliminate the old order, in which citizens are short-changed on the political and economic dividends of democracy. Genuine efforts made by the government towards the effective mobilisation of human and material resources to accelerate economic and infrastructural development in Nigeria are also relevant in this context. Indeed, this is a virtuous goal, and the media are expected to mobilise and promote national development objectives. On this point, Islam (2002, p.1) noted that "the media are more likely to promote better economic performance." This opinion by Islam prompted the researcher to examine whether the media has done what it is supposed to do in promoting the fight against corruption for the benefit of all. This relates to our understanding of journalism professionals' conceptions of the government's anticorruption crusade and the challenges that they face in covering stories about corruption.

Another useful framework for analysing the media's treatment of the government's anticorruption crusade is Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model. It posits that mainstream mass media content is influenced by political and economic factors, with the consequential effect of determining what should be and what can be the content of media messages and to that extent, "less powerful interests and perspectives get less than a fair hearing in the political forum" (Lichtenberg, 1990, p.123).

In addition, ownership of the media is a central element in the propaganda model and is particularly related to issues of ideology and the political economy.⁴⁷ Critical scholars of the

⁴⁷ For further reading, see Abubakre, F. (2017) "Influencing the message: the role of Media Ownership on the press coverage of the 2015 Presidential Electoral Campaign in Nigeria." *Brazilian Journalism Research*, 13(3) 60-85

Marxist tradition, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, typically aligned themselves with the ideology of Karl Marx, who expressed the following in a famous quotation:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force in society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal [i.e., government-owned and privately owned corporations and conglomerates] has control at the same time over the means of mental production [i.e., media and media content], so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it [acquiesce]. (Marx and Engels, 1970, in Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 220).

The notion that the mass media, which operates under a liberal democracy, can help “manufacture consent” for the government was seen as unacceptable and resisted by leading academics such as Robert Entman, who likened it to a “conspiracy theory.” In addition, Daniel Hallin found fault with the framework on account of journalistic professionalism and the ideals of objectivity (Herman, 2000). Consequently, despite its relevance to the shaping of culture and ideology, the propaganda model has “received very little attention within mainstream media and communication studies, sociology, or the wider social sciences” (Mullen & Klaehn, 2010, p.215). Conversely, the concept of media framing—a key element in the manufacturing of consent—has thrived. Of the many events which occur daily in society, journalists and their editors must determine those that they perceive to be the most important as a matter of routine. It is by gleaning from the communication of information which is considered important that the state seeks to legitimise itself, because such information is central to the ideology and markings of authority in society (Coleman & Ross, 2010; Hadland, 2015). As Chomsky noted, propaganda that was effective for controlling the public mind became necessary because the “state has lost the power to coerce” (Chomsky 2002, p.16).

In the Nigerian context, British colonialists strategically conducted media training in newspaper, radio, and television production among locals to guarantee the preservation and maintenance of the empire’s ideological inclinations (Uche, 1991, p.3). Notwithstanding the

animosity between Nigerian nationalist journalists, who were anxious to see the end of British colonial rule, and colonial administrators, who were tasked with entrenching the British empire's hegemony in the aftermath of World War I, there was a marked quid pro quo in the relationship between journalists and politicians. For example, Azikiwe, who was one of Nigeria's foremost nationalists and editor of the *West African Pilot*, reaped the benefits of his relationship with colonial governors. Such benefits included favourable land allocation for his media business (see Flint, 1999, p.151). In return, he demonstrated loyalty to the British cause during World War II. Conversely, Azikiwe's style of diplomatic agreement with the British changed when his role in the anti-colonialism media struggle is brought to spotlight.

The thesis argues that the media in Nigeria does not always share a common interest with the government in the crusade against corruption. Thus, the next chapter focuses on Nigeria's political economy and provides a contextual overview of the country's contemporary media environment. The challenge of establishing the propaganda model inherent within this framework becomes grim. This is because mainstream print media outlets in Nigeria are privately owned enterprises.

2.2. Journalism and liberal ideology

A review of the academic literature on journalism and media studies shows that many theories and methods are mainly steeped in the liberal model of journalism, which derives from established norms in Western democracies such as the United States and their counterparts in the United Kingdom. Key features of the liberal model include providing information to citizens and ensuring their right to participation, achieving economic self-sufficiency without government intervention, and serving as a political watchdog. Elections are another major component of the liberal model, as they are required to establish a government that is representative of the people. Communication plays a significant role in tying together all these

processes. In this context, political leaders strive to be seen as trustworthy by potential voters and deserving of their vote (See Mustapha, 2017, pp. 312-321).

In the liberal model, communication is seen as a “marketplace” in which good and bad ideas are allowed to mingle and compete for the attention of the people, without censorship. IN addition, it is believed that good ideas will drive out bad ideas. According to John Stuart Mill (1859/2009), a silenced opinion may contain an element of truth, while a general opinion is “rarely or never the whole truth.” He further noted that “it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied” (p.88) as contained in his view as follows:

There is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides: it is when they attend only to one that errors harden into prejudices, and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood. (p.87)

Like many other African nations over the past two decades, Nigeria has moved away from dictatorship and embraced representative democracy through elections despite flaws⁴⁸ with the polls. However, this is where the similarity with the liberal model ends; the situation is very different with journalism or the relationship of government with the media.

Unlike in the United States, where a liberal ideology is backed by the First Amendment principle that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,” successive governments in various African nations, including Nigeria, have established censorship laws to curtail the media, encouraging self-censorship among journalists and citizens alike. Nevertheless, Nigeria has been acknowledged as having “one of the freest

⁴⁸ There is widespread voter apathy in the Nigerian electoral system because many citizens believe that their votes do not count due to various degrees of rigging. Indeed, former Nigerian president Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who served between 2007 and 2009, acknowledged that vote rigging brought him into office. As a result, since the country's return to a democratic system of government in 1999, there has been a gradual decrease in voters despite increased media access among citizens. For instance, of the 82.3 million registered voters in the 2019 general elections, only 28.6 million actually turned out to vote.

presses in the Third World” (Seng & Hunt, 1986, p.85). This may be attributable to the media’s struggle to wrest independence from the British in 1960, the freedom of the press during the first republic, the media’s success in toppling a military dictatorship, and the restoration of democracy since more than two decades now. With the activities of the media throughout those events, it has carved a niche for itself which translates to enjoying freedom which it now does.

Nigeria also passed the Freedom of Information Act in 2011 to enable citizens to access public records. However, media outlets have not been accorded priority in accessing public records for news gathering (Aliyu, 2017, p.240). This is perhaps due to the tendency of some government agencies (e.g., the NNPC) to routinely refuse the release of information sought under the law. Nevertheless, Bennett (2010) believes that press freedom does not necessarily guarantee the availability of quality public information due to commercialism and journalists’ dependence on official sources; consequently, “news often seems more a record of the ebb and flow of political power than a steady or independent discussion of the issues over which those power struggles are based” (p.106).

Historically, liberal thought in Nigeria was largely associated with the privately owned press, which was critical of public officials. This ideology is significant in defining the relationship between media and the government, both under military regimes and democratic rule. After the introduction of broadcast media by British colonialists,⁴⁹ broadcast news outlets and telecommunication services were monopolised by federal and state governments until 1992⁵⁰ (unlike Nigerian print media outlets). In addition, broadcast news outlets were driven by a

⁴⁹ As part of measures to extend the BBC’s services throughout the British Empire, the Colonial Office established the Radio Distribution Service in 1932 in Lagos. By 1952, radio broadcasting became well-entrenched with the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBC) under the control of the federal government.

⁵⁰ Deregulation of the broadcast industry started in 1992 after the establishment of the National Broadcasting Commission, which was backed by NBC Decree 38 (1998). It provided the conditions under which broadcast licenses could be obtained.

public service ethos, which constrained their editorial freedom; thus, they were viewed as propaganda tools of the government both at the national and state level.

2.2.1. Guiding ideology of the present thesis

In pre-independence Nigeria, the Colonial Office governed the natives, administered political institutions, and shaped their ideology. After World War I, it was crucial to counter the Soviet anti-imperialist narrative and promote Western liberal norms and values. To this end, the Colonial Office articulated colonial policies and entrenched the British Empire's hegemony (see Jenks, 2016).

However, the colonialists needed to maintain an accommodating relationship with nationalist newspaper men, at least to a certain extent (see Newell, 2015, pp.110-112). The colonial stance was a precursor of later moves toward decolonisation. In 1960, when Nigeria secured independence from Britain with Balewa as Prime Minister, he was of the same policy of absolute neutrality with Patrice Lumumba of Congo who secured independence a couple of months before Nigeria. Both of them refused to align with foreign powers, especially Russia.

Prominent nationalist agitators in Nigeria included Macaulay and Azikiwe. In Macaulay's demise in 1946, two important figures stood out between 1948 and independence in 1960: Azikiwe and Awolowo. Their efforts served fuelled the nation's political development and enabled the establishment of a Nigerian mass media infrastructure. For nationalist newspaper owners such as Azikiwe, the publisher of the *West African Pilot*, and Awolowo, the publisher of the *Nigerian Tribune*, survival,

influence, and political activity required a high public profile. In other words, they disseminated nationalist rhetoric in their newspapers and championed the cause of self-rule to bolster their own image and political identity.

Censorship and the prohibition of publications was considered extreme by the colonial authorities. However, the writings and activities of anticolonial actors could result in prosecutions for sedition. To quell this truculence, British administrators sought to attract British investors to the media sector in West Africa. In this context,⁵¹ the famed Mirror Group of London arrived in Lagos in 1947 (Chick, 1996). It was unarguably linked to the “professionalisation” of journalistic practice in Nigeria, in contrast to the nationalistic newspaper men, who were necessarily partisan.

In northern Nigeria, the colonial administrators also financially supported the liberal cause; the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, which was established in the aftermath of World War II, largely funded the Gaskiya Corporation established in the north. The Gaskiya Corporation published *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* (“Truth is Worth More than a Penny”),⁵² the leading newspaper in the region. The English version was known as the *Nigerian Citizen*, which later became the *New Nigerian*.⁵³

With the activities of radical nationalists in southern Nigeria, there was a much more flourishing media in this area than those in the northern part of

⁵¹ See Chapter 3, Section 3.2, p. 105..

⁵² In this case, the penny refers to the cost of the newspaper.

⁵³ See Chapter One.

the country as noted in Chapter One. This disparity, coupled with the regionalisation agenda championed by ethnic nationalists from the three main ethnic groups, gave the British authorities cause for concern regarding how nationalists might use the media. As a cardinal value of journalism, objectivity was secondary to the editorial concerns of the nationalist press in the quest for political power, although their resistance to colonialism seemed to bear similar traits located within the optics of liberal ideology.

In the south, Cecil Harmsworth King of the Mirror Group laid the foundation for the newspaper industry's liberal orientation and the professionalisation of newsroom operations. King sought competent hands to run the *Daily Times*, which became notable not only for its independent stance but also its commercial success. Parallel to the activities of nationalist-owned media outlets, it could be argued that professional journalism practice (1946–1976) bore similar characteristics as the liberal model that was prominent in the United States and Britain (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Admittedly, these authors wrote specifically about Britain and the United States, but the current researcher identified some convergence may be due to chance with the scenario in Nigeria. This remained the case until the military decided to intervene in media affairs in Nigeria following its acquisition of controlling shares in two frontline newspapers, the *Daily Times* and the *New Nigerian*, in the south and north of the country, respectively.

Different military regimes, especially under Buhari as military head of state (1983–1984), had used the media as a social mobiliser and consistently championed it for national development purposes (Seng and Hunt, 1986, p.86). However, the military government was notorious for neutering the effectiveness of the media's watchdog role, which impacted public trust. Thus, the notion of a free press in Nigeria a contested one. The deregulation of the broadcast media

industry, which allowed private ownership of broadcast news outlets in Nigeria, began in 1992 with the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission by the military government of Babangida, who was reputed for using a “carrot and stick” strategy in his relationship with the media.⁵⁴ Thus, one can argue that the media system in Nigeria exhibits some typical traits of the polarised pluralist model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), including censorship and a weak media market.

2.2.1.1. Global communication imbalance and the rise of development journalism

Another dimension of colonial hegemony is the role of transnational global news agencies. For example, Reuters was granted secret subsidies by the British government from the 1950s to the early 1960s, when many African countries struggled for independence. This move was intended to influence the African mediasphere and fund professional journalistic training (see Jenks, 2016). Communication imbalances emerged in the aftermath of World War II between the Global North and Third World countries as a result of criticisms of cultural imperialism attributed to the liberal model. The 1980 UNESCO-commissioned MacBride Report represented a significant effort in the attempt to address communication imbalances between economically advanced societies and developing nations such as Nigeria (foreword to UNESCO, MacBride Report, 1980, pp. xiii-xvi).

To address the problem at the national level, the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture in Nigeria organised a seminar at the

⁵⁴ See also p. 41 for details about this military government’s relationship with the media and its approach to corruption.

Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) in Badagry on February 7, 1987. This seminar effectively marked a welcome of the developmental philosophy underpinning journalism practice in Nigeria.⁵⁵ At this event, select stakeholders from Nigerian tertiary institutions participated in drafting a national policy on communication. A central theme in the draft of the communication policy was the mobilisation of the media and other identified political institutions and structures in the society “in a chain system relationship for the propagation of the national goals and objectives” (Odunola and Kolade, 2012, p.18). Put simply, what media practitioners should seek to pursue is development of journalism.

Three decades after this seminar, concerned stakeholders have continued to criticise gaps in the document, describing it as too “governmental” and difficult to implement due to factors such as poverty, corruption, inconsistency in the direction of government, emerging global realities, commercialisation and its consequences, a skewed elite, urban-centred orientation, and a lack of local participation. Thus, these experts called for a communication policy and strategy that was “locally relevant, culturally nuanced and should serve Nigeria’s national interests” (Ojo, 2016).

2.2.1.2. Press laws and censorship in post-independence Nigeria

It is important to note that, under the new Nigerian government shortly after independence in 1960, legislation which sought to constrain relatively wide media freedoms (except for older libel laws and seditious offenses ordinances introduced by the British in the first decade of the

⁵⁵ See National Communication Policy, http://nigeriacommunityradio.org/mascompolicy_pg1.php

century)⁵⁶ was introduced and enacted into law by the parliament. This legislation included the Official Secrets Act of 1962 and the Newspapers Amendment Act of 1964 (Seng & Hunt, 1986, p.89).

Cecil King's protégé at the *Daily Times*, Ismail Babatunde Jose, was regarded as the doyen of Nigerian journalism. He recognised that there was a limit to how African journalists could cover corruption. He said the following in an address at a joint meeting of the Royal African Society and the Royal Institute of International Affairs held at Chatham House on 10 April 1975:

... except that in the age of Watergate and the Pentagon papers, African editors cast envious glances across the ocean to their colleagues in that area of the world. An apparently innocuous report or investigation that an American editor would use without hesitation could, in Africa, earn the editor a period of jail. It could even in certain ominous instances be that editor's last. (Jose, 1975, p.256)

Nevertheless, Jose, who rose through the ranks as a trainee copy boy to become the managing director of the *Daily Times* at its peak, went on to mentor and motivate a generation of young, highly trained Nigerian journalists, who initiated campaigns to strengthen democratic governance. These journalists included Dele Giwa, who was killed by a time bomb allegedly sponsored by the military government. Giwa's associate, Dele Olojede, narrowly escaped with his life and fled to the United States, where he worked for *Newsday*. He was the first non-American Black journalist to win a Pulitzer Prize for his work on the Rwandan genocide.

Regarding press laws and censorship measures introduced between 1962 and 1964, successive military governments in Nigeria continued to restrict press freedom, arguing that the "development of the country must take precedence over any foreign cries for a free press" (Seng & Hunt, 1986, p.101). The military governments became more ruthless. Thus, press laws

⁵⁶ 1903 and 1909, respectively.

became even more punitive, and journalistic ideology and practice in Nigeria was confronted by the practical dilemma of having to take on an adversarial role or justify governmental plans and policies.

As the military rulers fully established themselves in matters of governance, scholars argued that they consistently sought to maximise gains for themselves and their cronies at the expense of the public, in whose name and interests they claimed to act. According to Ikpe (2000), this state of affairs had three consequences for democracy in Nigeria. First, it provided a fertile ground for the pursuit of hegemonic politics, which engendered mutual suspicion and intolerance among ethnic groups. Secondly, it led to unchecked corruption. Third, it spurred a sense of injustice and alienation among the people, which resulted in the sharp decline of state legitimacy (Ikpe, 2000, p.147). Thus, it is necessary to explore the role of journalism in democracy and society.

2.2.1.3. Society, corruption, ideology, and the role of journalism in democracy

The Western form of democracy is still considered a standard benchmark for democratic progress by many nations. It requires a systematic theory about society. Emile Durkheim's interest in scientific morality, which was inspired by Aristotelian ethics, led him to analyse the dynamics of social behaviour and society to understand how society functions for the greater good (Gorski, 2017). As addressed by Durkheim, issues related to the structures and organisation of society are indicative of the liberal democratic system, in which the problems of corruption, if tackled, create opportunities to engender social order and reinforce social cohesion within the political system.

A virile media contributes to the strengthening of processes involved in exercising effective oversight on the actions of political actors who might abuse public offices, as Scott Brenton

argued. (2012, p.816, see also Gorski, 2017, pp.194-195). In the same discussion, Brenton outlined four factors that come into play when societal norms are transgressed:

Firstly, social norms are transgressed, and the actions involve selfishness and intent or recklessness; secondly, a political actor(s) is identified as the perpetrator (s), and there is an admission or attribution of responsibility; thirdly, the media are involved and tend to narrativize the events into a story; and finally, there is public discussion about the incident and debate about possible consequences. Each of these factors is related to the maintenance of liberal democracy. (2012, p.818)

This underscores the significant role of the media in the construction and presentation of corruption issues and the anticorruption crusade, with its attendant implications for society. That said, it is clear that the manner in which an individual transgresses societal norms through corrupt acts is brought to the attention of the public through the narratives of journalists or media practitioners. How the perpetrator is constructed in the news is at the discretion of the journalist or editor based on the newsworthiness of the issue. Identifying the hero or villain of the story is important to the narrative of the journalist or media practitioner. In summary, this locale is connected to how “everyday political reality is laid bare” (Neckel 2005, p.102) and explains why an investigation of how journalists cover corruption stories is focal to this research.

While the liberal ideology and development journalism are not mutually exclusive, it is important to mention that, when journalism professionals work with the adversarial gumption (liberal ideology), they serve as a strong force and pressure the government to ensure accountability. On the other hand, when they focus on the developmental orientation by collaborating with the government and adopting a non-adversarial stance in journalistic practice, they help persuade citizens to change their behaviour, educate them about the importance of corrupt acts, and encourage them to avoid corruption to improve societal conditions. In here, they take a more contextual stance that aligns with the intricacies of the

environment, in contrast to a Western-centric ideology. Thus, the framing of corruption stories in the media lends itself well to persuasion.

2.2.1.4. Carey vs. Schudson

In the introduction to the book *Thinking Clearly: Cases in Journalistic Decision-Making*,⁵⁷ media critic and theorist James W. Carey underscores the significant link between democracy and journalism, noting that one cannot be without the other: “No journalism, no democracy. And equally: no democracy, no journalism.” He further noted that “when democracy falters, journalism falters, and when journalism goes awry, democracy goes awry (p.2).” Thus, the deterioration of the democratic system in Nigeria would be directly related to the deterioration of journalism, and vice versa.

However, Schudson (2008) disagreed with Carey’s argument and stated that “democracy and journalism are not the same thing.” Schudson also noted that Carey’s assertion took “journalism’s democratic virtue a step too far” (p.11). He indicated, “Democracy does not necessarily produce journalism, nor does journalism necessarily produce democracy” (p.12). However, he highlighted seven ways in which journalism could serve the democratic system.

These functions include providing full information to members of the public to educate them on the actions of their political leaders, keeping public office holders accountable to ensure that they fulfil their promises to the people by conducting investigative reporting, interpreting the news to enable citizens to understand how an issue affects them, encouraging the people to tell their stories to foster empathy in society, providing a platform for interaction and debate, and advocating for the mobilisation and articulation of issues and policies that affect the people. According to Schudson, the seventh and final function of journalism is “publicising

⁵⁷ See James W. Carey (2003), Introduction in *Thinking Clearly, Cases in Journalistic Decision-Making*, / Tom Rosentel and Amy S. Mitchell (eds.) New York: Columbia University Press

representative democracy.” He also enjoined journalists “to cover more carefully” institutions (e.g., the executive branch in a presidential system of government) and relationships (e.g., checks and balances in governmental institutions to increase accountability) which they took for granted or ignored.

However, Rasmus Nielsen was critical of journalism scholars’ tendency to have high expectations for journalism. He argued for a more cautious premise, indicating that “we do not get more from journalism simply by wishing for more” (2017, p.1251). To the extent that journalists can provide citizens with “relatively accurate, accessible, diverse, relevant, and timely independently produced information about public affairs,” he contended that journalism would be brought closer to democracy (p.1252). In her discussion of media systems, Katrin Voltmer also noted that democratic change can challenge the very meaning of democracy (2012, p.233). The previous discussion of various perspectives on the relationship between journalism and democracy introduced the theoretical framework, which is examined in more detail in the following subsections.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The African oral tradition is largely dictated by communal ethics and reflects guiding principles associated with relationship building and institutions. Through this process, members of the community make sense of their world and teach significant aspects of their culture to their descendants. Rulers were regarded as the custodians of culture. Supported by chiefs, they ruled over their kingdoms prior to modern systems of governance. When rulers were found to have abused their office through corruption or other crimes, they were asked to commit suicide. This was metaphorically expressed as opening the *igba iwa* (“calabash of good conduct”), which means the “calabash of death” (Oyediran 1973, p. 375). This was an African way of addressing corruption in governance.

Given the above, adapting theoretical concepts from Western communication scholarship does not necessarily impede our understanding of media practice in an African societal context. Rather, such concepts, including the sociology of journalism (Mabweazara, 2015), could also contribute to shedding light on the socio-cultural and linguistic aspects of news production in African society.

However, they must be applied with caution to ensure their relevance in an African context. Attention should be paid to the realities of the African worldview. However, established theoretical perspectives from the Western hemisphere could provide useful frames for shaping our understanding of media practice and mapping out parameters for understanding African journalism in contemporary Nigeria. As Mabweazara (2015, p.118) stated, “the application and appropriateness of a theory should be based on its relevance rather than its geographical or socio-cultural origins.”

That said, this thesis adopts framing theory to guide the research and develop a theoretical framework that is indigenous to Africa. Due to its interpretative potential, framing theory can be used to integrate other foundational theories of journalism, such as gatekeeping, agenda setting, or indexing. In addition to its central relevance to journalistic practices, the inherent nature of framing theory allows it to accommodate other scholarly conceptualisations and their contributions. Thus, this research also recognises the works of two classical theorists, Emile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu, to illustrate how media practitioners cover the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

2.3.1. The concept of framing

In the opening of the second chapter of his seminal work *Discovering the News*, Schudson drew attention to how journalists could impact citizens’ perceptions of social issues and policy

debates through the manner in which they told stories. He shared the story of a reporter named Richard Harding Davis and an artist named Frederic Remington, who both were sent to Havana by William Randolph Hearst, the editor of the *New York Journal*, to cover the conflict between Spanish authorities and Cuban insurgents in December 1896. While Davis remained in Havana, Remington returned to New York a week later because he was discouraged by the intractable task of obtaining news, as reporters were barred from the war zone by the Spanish armed forces. Around six weeks after arriving in Cuba, Davis forwarded a story to Hearst that described how Spanish police officers boarded an American ship to search three Cuban female passengers, whom the police had accused of transmitting messages to insurgent leaders. Hearst featured the story on the cover page of the *New York Journal*.

According to Schudson, the sensational story “was accompanied on page two by a half-page drawing by Remington, imagining the scene from New York, showing one of the women naked and surrounded by Spanish officers going through her clothing” (p.62). Thanks to the exposé, it was reported that Hearst sold nearly 1 million copies of the newspaper. However, the claims made in the report by the *New York Journal* were soon debunked by its close competitor and rival, Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. Reporters from *New York World* interviewed the women in the aftermath of their encounter with the police and revealed that they were searched by matrons, not by Spanish officers, as Davis had initially reported. Davis considered the incident as a stain on his reputation as a reporter; it eventually led to his falling out with Hearst. In his defence, Davis blamed Remington for misrepresenting the story:

I never wrote that she was searched by men . . . Mr. Frederic Remington, who was not present, and who drew an imaginary picture of the scene, is responsible for the idea that the search was conducted by men. Had I seen the picture before it appeared, I should never have allowed it to accompany my article. (Cited by Schudson, 1978 p.63).

4Nevertheless, Schudson submitted that “Davis cannot be absolved from blame for the misrepresentation” because of the ambiguity of his report:

He did not say that men searched the women, but he did not say that women had conducted the search. Given earlier reports in the Journal and other New York papers regarding the Spanish mistreatment of Cuban women, it was possible, even likely, that any artist or headline writer would have made the interpretation the Journal made. But in the story on the Olivette search, Davis clearly expressed shock at the actions of the Spanish authorities and suggested that American intervention would be justified . . . If Remington’s drawing got details of Davis story wrong, it nonetheless caught the tone Davis expressed. (1978, p.64)

The above analysis captures the essence of media framing by journalists. The implication of framing by journalists also aligns with Merrill’s (2002, p.73) argument that the media simply represents (or reflects) the bias of reporters and editors. He highlighted that “the bias may be unintentional, but it is still bias; it may be subconsciously woven into the fabric of the story, but it is still bias. Bias is natural. It permeates the media-even the news stories.”

The concept of framing has its origins in psychology (Bateson, 1955; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984) and sociology (Goffman, 1974; Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Framing has been described as “a central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p.143). Framing is a critical component of political communication and is especially significant because of its ability to control and define much of what individuals and groups understand about events not only within their immediate environment but also around the world. Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano (2009, p.178) credited Walter Lippmann as the progenitor of framing theory based on his assertion that we do not experience the world directly.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ According to Walter Lippmann, the world that people “have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind”. In other words, it is a mediated reality.

The theoretical framework for the present thesis is based on how Nigerian journalists interpret or frame the Buhari administration's anticorruption campaign as a key policy, which is further discussed in the following subsections. Since framing theory can accommodate other foundational journalistic theories, the concept of news values is included as a significant component of journalism. It should be noted that, while news values are undoubtedly helpful for understanding journalistic context in academia, this term is not used in newsrooms but in journalism scholarship (as indicated by Hadland, 16 August 2021).

2.3.1.1. Framing as a popular concept in communication studies

Framing in communication studies and as a theory of media effect has been described as “one of the most fertile areas of current research in journalism and mass communication” (Riffe, 2004, p.2). Scheffle and Iyengar (2014, p.2) indicated that, “communication researchers have become infatuated with the framing concept” providing evidence for the increased popularity of the concept. According to the researchers, between 1990 and 1999, the *Political Communication* and *Journal of Communication* journals published a total of 15 papers on framing. However, between 2000 and 2009, a total of 38 papers were published by both journal outlets.

As a research topic, framing has become so pervasive that a member of the audience at a research session of the 2011 Association for Education in Journalism and Communication (AEJMC) pushed for a moratorium on framing research because it was “overused and sometimes misused in communication research to the point where it has become unclear what is framing and what is not, creating a blurred line between framing and other media effects models” (Kim, 2019, p.12). Hence, Robert Entman, whose 1993 definition of framing is among the most cited in the field, described framing as a “fractured paradigm” (Entman, 1993). In addition, due to the challenges of conceptual consistency and operationalisation ambiguities associated with framing, some scholars have called for the abandonment of the term “framing”

in favour of the much narrower concept of “equivalent framing”; this would prevent framing from being used as a convenient “catch-all phrase” for various studies on media effects (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016, p.19).

However, equivalent framing, which refers to “logically equivalent words or phrases to produce framing effects” (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016, p.5) appears to be more suitable for psychology than journalism. The restricted notion of equivalent framing might undermine its applicability to journalism, its practice, and corresponding implications for society. As Bruggemann (2014, p.61) noted, “journalism is about interpreting the world.” Framing is as a potent tool for analyse journalistic practices. Despite the limitations of framing, it is still widely accepted among scholars as a way of explaining how individuals and groups make sense of realities in society.

For journalists, the utility of framing in organising and/or translating a complicated discourse into a comprehensive narrative should not be underestimated because it is an essential element in the democratic process (Schudson, p.16). Thus, within this research, framing is used to discuss psychological issues surrounding the contextuality of news coverage of the anticorruption war by journalism professionals in Nigeria. A standard definition of framing was provided by Entman (2004, p.5), who described it as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.”

However, Scheufele and Iyengar (2014, p.3) contended that “framing effects refer to communication effects that are not due to differences in *what* is being communicated, but rather to variations in *how* a given piece of information is being presented (or framed) in public discourse.” Hence, tools such as language or valence are fundamental to framing research.

2.3.1.2. Media support and the governing process

When a news outlet exposes corruption in governance, particularly through investigative journalism (e.g., the 1972 Watergate scandal), the media is likely to earn greater confidence and trust from members of the public, which enhances its credibility and influences public opinion (Monck, 2008). In addition to the basic interface between the media and the government, public opinion, which is reflected by the media, plays a central role in the effective functioning of a democracy. The executive branch, led by the president, wants the media to believe that it is fighting corruption; it wants the media to buy into its policies, such as an anticorruption campaign. This also is true of other arms of government, such as the legislature and the judiciary. Buhari noted, “Democratic governance based on individual liberties, human rights, a free press and the rule of law requires us to be fair and just in dealing with all cases of corruption.”⁵⁹

The legitimacy of the anticorruption crusade is that it is directly relevant and necessary for enhanced socio-political, sociocultural, and improved socio-economic performance. The media, on its part, plays a critical role in how perceptions about governance issues on corruption and public institutions are shaped and how such contents are articulated, in terms of its resonance, and acting in the overall interest of citizens, all of which, affect the electoral process. This underscores the significance of the news media’s contributions to the governing process (Cook, 2005).

2.3.1.3. Journalism professionals and the framing of corruption

Journalism professionals are members of the public. Like other citizens, they are affected by the content that they produce for society (Schuefele, 2006). Bruggeman (2014, p.62) argued

⁵⁹ See Buhari’s address at the 2016 Anti-Corruption Summit in the United Kingdom. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/against-corruption-a-collection-of-essays/against-corruption-a-collection-of-essays#president-muhammadu-buhari-my-plan-to-fight-corruption-in-nigeria>

that the “professional criteria of newsworthiness as well as value judgements will play a role when journalists produce texts with certain news frames.” Corroborating the efforts of other prominent scholars in the field, Bruggeman distinguished between journalists’ frames, which he referred to as “cognitive patterns of interpretation of individual journalists’ from news frames which are ‘patterns of meaning’” (Bruggeman, 2014, p.63) reflected in media products. Nevertheless, journalism professionals may also be motivated by acknowledgment or appreciation from members of the public or the “awareness of the weapon of words which they have in their hands and the damage that it could do to the ‘bad guys’” (Pool and Shulman, 1959, p.147).

“Frames” or “framing”⁶⁰ is certainly not a given; it is a contested phenomenon that operates at different levels in a political system comprised of politicians and their political parties, the business class, civil society and non-governmental organisations, and the media (journalism and journalists), with members of the public serving as the audience, who are determined to articulate their views based on “key political interests” (Reese, 2001, p.21). This allows individuals and groups to create and manipulate “information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable or disable the agency of others” (Chadwick, 2013, p.4). These processes, Dimitrova and Connelly-Ahern (2007) noted, are significant given that “framing has implications for the worldview of those exposed to it” (p.155). Hence, actors in a political system compete over the right to define and shape issues and the discourse surrounding them.

2.3.1.4. Robert Entman’s cascading activation model and news coverage of corruption

The cascading activation model (2003) developed by political scientist Robert Entman is employed in the current thesis to analyse coverage of corruption. It can serve as another useful illustration of the interplay of media framing among the political class, the media, and members

⁶⁰ “Frame” is used in this thesis as a verb; its present participle is “framing.”

of the public at a macro level. The relevance of this model stems from its applicability to the system of governance in Nigeria. As a former British colony, Nigeria inherited the parliamentary system of governance upon achieving independence in 1960. After independence, as part of measures to unite Nigeria in the aftermath of the 1967 civil war, the country abandoned the parliamentary structure in favour of the American presidential model in 1979.⁶¹ Muhammed's military regime intended to decentralise the country's governance structure and entrench the principle of public accountability (see FRN, 1975; Awotokun, 2020). Thus, the cascading activation model, which was patterned after the American presidential system, is also a good fit for the governance structure in Nigeria.

The model, which has been compared to a cascading waterfall, posits that frames (policy formulations and directions) are articulated by the White House⁶² (i.e., presidency), which possesses the greatest influence and strength. This flows to a second level of elites who are not associated with the presidency; these are usually members of parliament or congress in Nigeria, it is the National Assembly. Then, a third level represents journalists and their media organisations. Entman described this third level as a "key transmission point for spreading activation of frames, and it is not always easy to determine where the line between 'elite' and 'journalist' should be drawn, or who influences whom" (2004, p.420).

The third level is also significant because journalists can modify a frame before it is transmitted to members of the public via words and images. As Matthes (2012) observed, journalists

are not forced to automatically transport the frames suggested by the political elite. They can select, shape, and reframe the arguments suggested by other communicators. They can also suggest their own frames. Similarly, the [public] often

⁶¹ The goal was to further a sense of unity among the people, weaken the regionalism of the three dominant ethnic groups, and empower ethnic minorities. This state of affairs necessitated a strong federal centre with control over national resources. Thus, more states were created.

⁶² In Nigeria, Aso Rock is the seat of presidency.

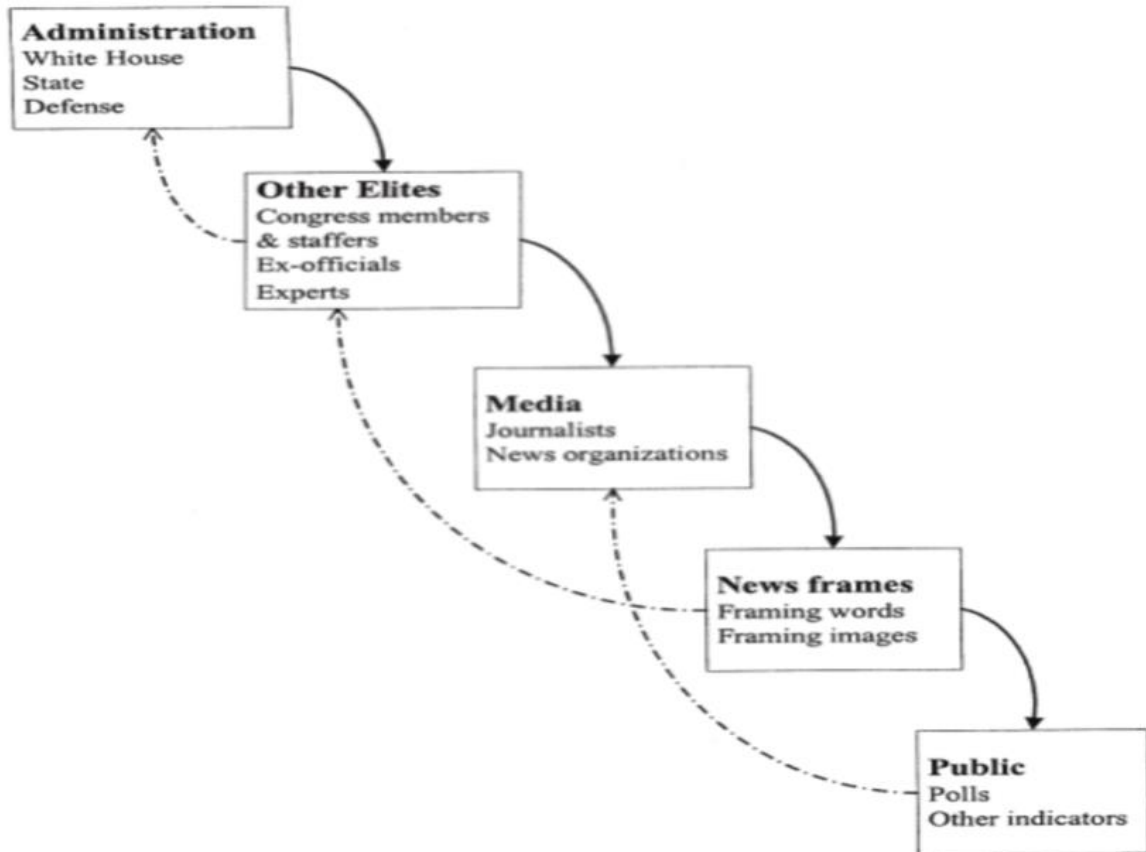
frames issues in ways that are suggested neither by political elites nor by journalistic news content (p.252).

Members of the public draw on different sources, including the news media, which plays a key role in shaping citizens' perceptions of corruption in a political system.

It is within this context that the researcher explores how journalism professionals frame the anticorruption war in Nigeria and investigates the challenges associated with reporting on it. There are different parts, but the complementary roles played by journalism-cum-media practitioners can affect the content (published or broadcast) that is ultimately presented to the public. This is a complex process. The present research focuses on journalists who cover corruption stories because they are the main originators or producers of the copy that may subsequently be subjected to transformation. Thus, Allan Bell referred to them as the "professional story-tellers of our age" (1991, p.147).

Nevertheless, it is only when we juxtapose and investigate "journalists' cognitive frames and the contents of coverage" that we can establish the "journalistic framing practices" (Bruggemann, 2014, p. 76) that underpin corruption coverage and how journalism is used to interpret the war on corruption. In terms of how this interpretation may affect the public, scholars have dismissed the notion that the media would assign blame to transgressors involved in a scandal. Rather, they have argued that citizens are guided by hints in news coverage to process information on corruption (Kepplinger et al., 2012, p.678).

Figure 3: Cascading network activation



Source: Entman, R.M. (2003). Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11, *Political Communication* 20(4) p.419

When the cascading activation model is applied to the Nigerian democratic context, we find that the Nigerian president, Buhari, is the chief promoter of the frame of the “war against corruption.” The origin of this frame can be partly traced to 1984, when Buhari was Nigeria’s military head of state. Along with his deputy, Tunde Idiagbon, Buhari introduced the “War Against Indiscipline” (WAI) policy, which was meant to reconstruct the character of Nigerian society and curb prevalent corruption and indiscipline, particularly in the nation’s political class under President Shagari (whose administration Buhari and Idiagbon overthrew) and among members of the public more generally (Agbaje & Adisa, 1988, p.27).

The WAI policy required television newscasters to wear WAI badges on their clothes during educational programmes and business organisations to display WAI posters on their walls and WAI buttons on the lapels of exemplary staff. However, it was also coupled with the introduction of stern decrees, some of which undermined the freedom of the press and individuals.⁶³ Nevertheless, scholars have established that journalists tend to show more trust in public institutions when they operate in a relatively free socio-political environment (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012, p.808).

The war on corruption frame is also impacted by Buhari's ascetic lifestyle, which is widely acknowledged by members of the public, particularly among his followers in the northern part of Nigeria (Omilusi, 2018). The BBC described Buhari's personal reputation for incorruptibility as "a rare feat among Nigeria's political leaders."⁶⁴ Since his inauguration as president on May 29, 2015 and his re-election to a second term in 2019, Buhari has continually pledged to fight corruption. His ministers, advisers, and aides have also joined him in the championing the war against corruption crusade.

At the second level of the cascade activation model, there are other elites who are also determined to participate in the fight against corruption, either by lending support to or discrediting the antigraft policy promoted by the Buhari administration. From the United States' Barack Obama to former U.K. prime minister Theresa May, foreign leaders have pledged support Buhari's anticorruption policy, which indicates that he has garnered immense external media capital. Other elites have also expressed alternative viewpoints. For example, Shehu Sani, a senator in the Eighth National Assembly, framed the anticorruption policy as an

⁶³ May, C. (1984) "Nigeria's Discipline Campaign: Not Sparing the Rod' New York Times, August 10, 1984, retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/08/10/world/nigeria-s-discipline-campaign-not-sparing-the-rod.html?module=ArrowsNav&contentCollection=World&action=keypress®ion=FixedLeft&pgtype=article>

⁶⁴ See BBC News: Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's new broom' president in profile' February 27, 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12890807>

“insecticide and a deodorant.” This may be explained by the existing tension between the executive branch and the legislature, particularly regarding the execution of oversight functions. According to media reports, Sani observed that “when it comes to fighting corruption in the National Assembly and the Judiciary and in the larger Nigerian sectors, [Buhari] uses insecticide, but when it comes to fighting corruption within the Presidency, he uses deodorants” (Baiyewu, 2017).

At the third level of the cascade activation model, Nigerian journalists and their media outlets have also accommodated “pro” and “anti” positions in their news reporting. In subsequent chapters, this thesis explores this phenomenon against the backdrop of the Nigerian media environment’s political economy. Thus, politicians and government officials can use the media to influence the framing of certain policy matters to promote their agenda, which is not readily apparent in most cases. An illustration of how journalists incorporate frames from other elites is the cartoon published in the *Business Day* newspaper. The influence of digital media at each stage of the framing process cannot be ignored, given the significance of political actors and many young Nigerians’ wider access to media through the internet. They constantly generate content that dynamically tilts the power to frame issues.

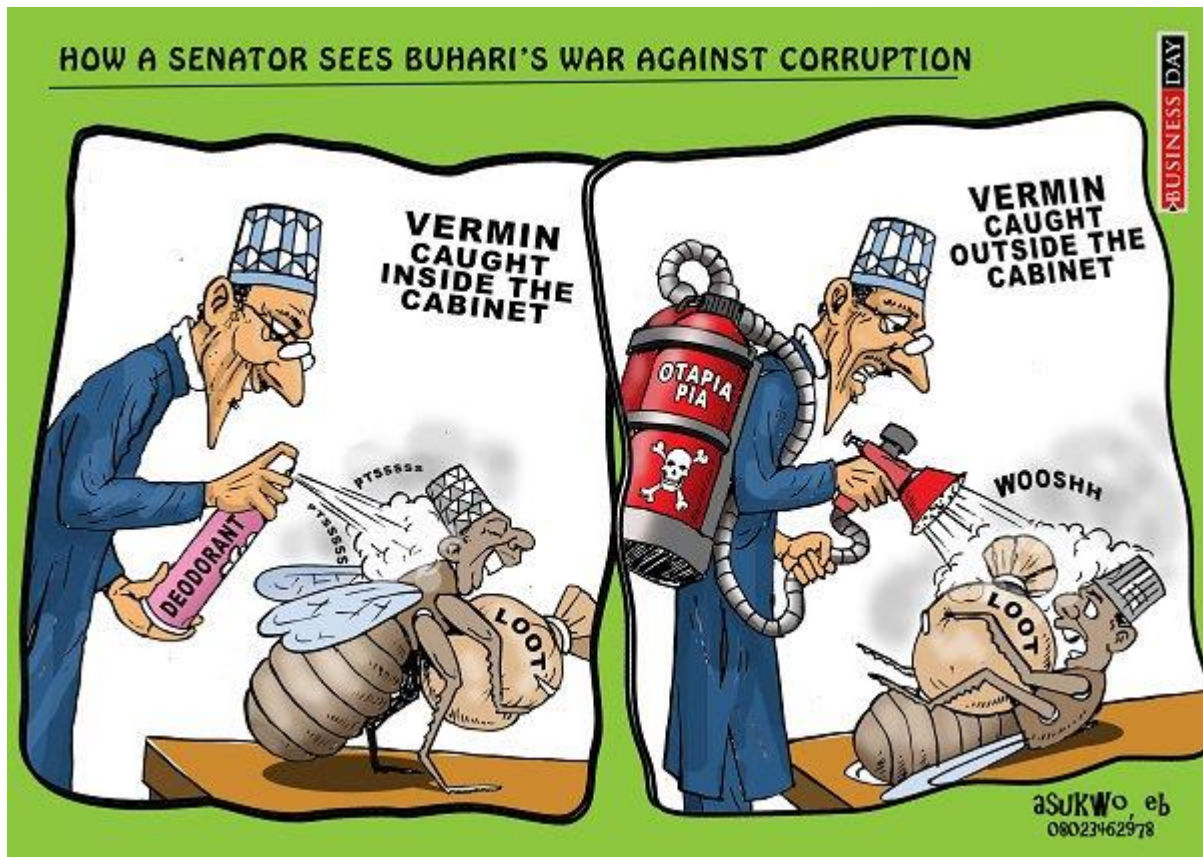


Figure 4: Source: Mike Asukwo, *Business Day*, January 26, 2017

2.3.2. Negotiating journalistic roles in the corruption and anticorruption discourse in Nigeria

Journalism has established that news gathering, and reporting are constantly subject to political and economic influences which can directly or indirectly impact the relationship between journalists and sources, affecting how stories are framed in the news (Fisher, 2018). In their news reports, media practitioners tend to include the voices or viewpoints of the elite, politicians, and institutions, who possess varying degrees of political power and competing interests. This practice is known as “indexing” in media coverage of a given issue (Bennett, 1990; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingstone, 2006; Bennett, 2019).

These social actors, including rogue political actors who engage in corruption, who, by virtue of their social status, have access to the media due to their social status and may convey misleading political facts through it. Their diverse interests warrant scrutiny of the news

coverage of corruption. The media itself has been described as a “filtering structure” (Lippman, 1922) for the selective dissemination of information to the people. Therefore, this raises the question of what guides journalism professionals in producing the portrayal of “corruption” that they present to the public. In a political environment that highlights an anticorruption war, to what extent does the media help to articulate on behalf of those accused of corruption?

Bourdieu’s field theory, one of his most profound works for explaining societal structures, can shed light on these questions. It underscores how journalism can exert a symbolic domination over other fields, particularly politics (which is characterised by intense competition), due to its access to the public (Bourdieu, 2005, pp.31&41). The journalistic field is distinct because journalism enjoys a ‘privileged cultural status’ (McNair,2005, p.26) given its capacity to shape ideology. Rodney Benson’s seminal work emphasized the importance of field theory to journalism due to its recognition of the complexities surrounding newsroom practices and the journalistic field in relation to power relations in society (See Benson 1999, p.479; Benson, 2006, p.195).

2.3.3. Corruption and news values

The parameters that guide journalism professionals in their day-to-day tasks of judging what should be reported as news does not occur by chance (Philips, 2015, p.6). Guided by their editors, journalism professionals make editorial decisions and actively seek out “examples of human behaviour that should be either punished or applauded,” thereby setting the boundaries for “allowable areas of debate to those that reflect the prevailing view of the world.” This suggests that, when journalism professionals choose and produce news on corruption, this has implications for how members of the public perceive related issues.

It is in the process of establishing what is *newsworthy* that media practitioners make choices about what content to present to audiences. Similarly, Monika Bednarek posited that journalism

professionals often “measure and judge the perceived newsworthiness of events based on what they imagine their audiences find newsworthy and use this judgement to select (include/exclude), order and produce news stories” (Bednarek, 2015, p.2).

By exploring the impact of audience metrics on international news production by foreign correspondents in sub-Saharan Africa, Mel Bunce (2015) found that, based on audience metrics, most participants’ editors often requested follow-up stories on issues that resonated with readers. A German scholar, Christiane Eliders (1997; cited in Eliders, 2006) adopted a more cognitive approach by examining how news values could aid selective retention among audiences. Building on the principles of selective attention,⁶⁵ she argued that less sophisticated citizens were likely to select news in accordance with news-related factors, while more knowledgeable citizens were likely to use more sophisticated criteria to select news that was of interest to them. Jorge (2005) attributed the potency of the inverted pyramid story structure in journalism to news values and contended that emphasising the facts of an event in order of importance “succeeds in giving a psychological, philosophical and organisational rationale to the order which journalists choose to give to the data supplied” (2005, p.57).

However, Tuchman (1978) stressed that the view or reality of the world that media practitioners present to audiences may be “problematic.” She used the analogy of a view through a window to explain the complexities associated with the quality of information relayed by media practitioners to the public:

The view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or a backyard. The unfolding scene also depends upon where one stands, far or near, craning one’s neck to the side, or gazing straight ahead, eyes parallel to the wall in which the window is encased. (Tuchman 1978, p.1)

⁶⁵ In selective attention, information is processed in a way that is initially peripheral to understanding. Then, evaluation takes place to determine if the information is deserving of further processing.

Similarly, Eliders (2006) explained that news factors can contribute to reducing “complexity by directing attention to the meaningful and potentially dangerous” (p.16). Reflecting on the works of Goffman (1974, 1981), Van Gorp (2007) emphasised the connectivity of culture in this interplay and highlighted the different dimensions of how culture could contribute to an interpretation of what information is made available to the public by the media. The cultural phenomena that he was concerned with necessarily yields to, among others, the creation of multiple sides to a story and the existence of an implicit construct of meaning not neglecting the power of its spontaneity, all of which are geared towards the production of a certain narrative or value in media outputs.

For Einar Ostgaard (1965), the key issue was the extent to which such factors could lead to the distortion of news, given that the media is considered the “last resort” in deciding what to present to the public (p.44). Research on news factors by his colleagues at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge (1965), has also been widely acknowledged in the journalism field. It laid the foundation for a scholastic line of inquiry on the analysis of news values (Bell, 1991; Harcup & O’Neill, 2001; Bednarek and Caple, 2016; Harcup & O’Neill, 2016, Harcup, 2020; Temmerman and Mast, 2021), although the scholars concern about news values stemmed from their investigation of conditions for peaceful coexistence among individuals and national actors across societies rather “than a fascination with news for its own sake,” according to Harcup (2020, p.17). For Jorge (2005), it was the scholarly work of Tobias Peucer in the 17th century, which focused on the selection of what to publish, that established the framework for elements of newsworthiness prior to Galtung and Ruge’s study in 1965. That said, this has not diminished Ostgaard’s important contributions, which underlined a politico-economic approach to explaining how events are selected as news.

The “power elite” is a leading criterion mentioned by Harcup and O’Neill (2011) that news stories must satisfy in order to make it into the news of the day. The Nigerian mediasphere is replete with corruption stories about people with immense political influence, from the president and the state governor to senators, judges, and billionaire businessmen. Even much better are when this news is by their nature, scandalous information about the powerful elite because such reports quickly gain entrance across the gate, making it to the front page of the newspaper or leading the news cast for the broadcast network news of the day. One can simply watch news and interviews on television or read major newspapers to encounter different forms of corruption in Nigerian society.

Shortly after the return to democratic governance after decades of military dictatorship in Nigeria, the news media was awash with references to corrupt acts perpetrated by members of the ruling class, from certificate forgery committed by the speaker of the House of Representatives, Salisu Buhari, to theft committed by the inspector general of police, Tafa Balogun, who was accused of stealing over 100 million U.S. dollars from the Police Treasury.⁶⁶ In addition, the media covered intrigues and plots associated with leaders in the legislative branch,⁶⁷ in which legislators were allegedly bribed by the government of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) to extend his tenure beyond constitutionally permitted terms.

Moreover, acts of corruption occurred under the late Umaru Yar’Adua (2007–2011) in the wake of speculations about his health and his eventual death in office. The role played by the

⁶⁶ Balogun served as Nigeria’s inspector general of police from 2002 to 2005. During this period, he was accused of stealing; he pled guilty and entered into a plea bargain with the authorities. As a result, he spent six months in prison and was then forced to retire. See ‘Nigerian ex-police chief jailed’ *BBC News*, 22 November 2005. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4460740.stm>; Also see: ‘Where is Tafa Balogun?’ *Daily Trust*, 31 December 2017. Retrieved from <https://dailytrust.com/where-is-tafa-balogun>

⁶⁷ See Emmanuel Aziken, ‘The plots and scandals of the Senate since 1999’ *Vanguard* 7 June 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/06/the-plots-and-scandals-of-the-senate-since-1999/>

then attorney general of the Federation, Michael Aondoakaa, in the defence of James Ibori⁶⁸, who was eventually jailed for corruption in the United Kingdom, was also a prominent feature of Yar'Adua's government.

There were also several stories about corruption involving cabinet members under the administration of Goodluck Jonathan (2011–2015). For example, Stella Oduah, the minister of aviation, allegedly compelled the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), an agency under her watch, to purchase two BMW bulletproof cars worth 255 million naira⁶⁹ for her private use. Others corrupt acts were associated with the ex-president's wife, Patience Jonathan, who allegedly drew a monthly salary as a permanent secretary in her home state of Bayelsa⁷⁰ despite being on a "leave of absence" following her husband's meteoric⁷¹ rise in Nigeria's politics.

In an environment marked by extreme inequality between the "haves" and the "have nots," what these stories had in common or suggested was a moral dimension; they assigned a sense of culpability or blame for corruption to members of the ruling political class and demanded a solution (i.e., an anticorruption crusade). It was against this backdrop that Buhari rode into power on a campaign theme of "change" and a pledge to fight corruption.

Regarding the link between corruption and scandals, Tumber and Waisbord (2004) noted that the latter often arise from discourses on corruption. The authors defined scandals as resulting

⁶⁸ James Ibori, a prominent politician in Nigeria's oil rich region was a former Governor of Delta state who embezzled state funds. He was convicted for money laundering in the UK and sentenced to 13 years in prison. Michael Aondoakaa, Nigeria's attorney general used his offices to shield Ibori from prosecution. The UK government returned about 5.8 million USD, proceeds of corruption perpetuated by Ibori to the Nigerian government.

⁶⁹ See John Campbell (2014) Nigerian Minister of Aviation Stella Oduah is in Trouble' African in Transition 13 January 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerian-minister-aviation-stella-oduah-trouble>

⁷⁰ See 'Sources: First lady Patience Jonathan has received Salaries from Bayelsa State since 1999!' Sahara Reporters, 12 July 2012. Retrieved from, <http://saharareporters.com/2012/07/12/sources-first-lady-patience-jonathan-has-received-salaries-bayelsa-state-1999>

⁷¹ In successive turns, Goodluck Jonathan served as Deputy governor, governor, vice-president, and president.

“from the publication of information about corruption” (p.1032). Moreover, Kepplinger, Geiss, and Siebert (2012, p.659) highlighted four conditions under which scandals develop:

- a. someone accuses public figures or organisations of
- b. having violated social norms or of having harmed someone or something and
- c. relevant media cover the case intensively, causing
- d. consistent views and widespread anger among the audience.

All these conditions are particularly true with respect to the coverage of corruption stories in the Nigerian mediasphere under the Buhari administration due to the sheer intensity of the anticorruption rhetoric.

Based on a cursory perusal of many of the nation’s daily newspapers, one can observe that nearly all news outlets cover the same story at around the same time. However, this is not surprising given the power elite’s vital place in the news, a value shared by many professional otherwise competing journalists. While researching patterns in the coverage of corruption, this thesis attempts to investigate how journalism professionals establish values of newsworthiness by analysing the content that they produce. This is significant because many other scholars have also focused on news values in areas such as sports journalism (Lee & Choi, 2009), science journalism (Badenschier & Wormer, 2012), and travel journalism (Cocking, 2017) over the past decade.

2.3.4. News sources and the framing of corruption

According to Berkowitz and Beach (1993), “sources shape the news more strongly than do journalists” (p.4). Furthermore, it has been observed that journalists learn the art of corruption through their relationships with sources (Ireeri, 2016). Like journalists around the world over, Nigerian journalists gather news and put together content to inform members of the public.

They do this by acting as eyewitnesses to the events that they report on or obtaining information through interviews with established authorities, such as the government, politicians and political parties, religious leaders, community leaders, or on social media platforms, such as blogs, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Fisher (2018) also noted,

While the journalist is looking for a story, the source can offer ideas. This discovery of “interactional” stage provides an opportunity for more cooperation between the two actors. However, once the reporter decides on the story, the power resides with them as he or she makes selective decisions about framing and construction of the story. (p.4)

Similarly, Dimitrova and Stromback (2009) indicated that the cultivation of sources from government agencies and institutions is also essential “to reduce uncertainty under deadline pressure” (p.76). Journalists write under intense time pressure and about issues that they are often not familiar with. This has implications for news framing, particularly in coverage of corruption. In the context of liberal democracies such as the United States and European countries such as Sweden, scholars have observed a pattern in the frequent use of official sources in news coverage. These systems’ influences on the media have been described as political parallelism.

A study by Waheed et al. (2013) found that journalism professionals in developing nations were more likely to portray positive values in news coverage of political speeches, in contrast to their counterparts from the West, who were more critical of the government. This is because journalists in developing nations are not only expected to mobilise citizens to support developmental ideals but also to work with the government to achieve these goals for the overall benefit of society.

In a fragile, middle-income country such as Nigeria,⁷² politicians often overshadow journalists in the interactive relationship between the media and sources. Political actors often use a carrot and stick approach with journalists, which can be described as clientelist. Politicians reward journalists with cash and gifts such as iPads, laptops, foreign trips, or even cars; journalists are expected to reciprocate these gestures through “absolute positive coverage.” Otherwise, journalists could be intimidated and subjected to threats of physical violence, which may be executed with relative impunity (Ciboh, 2017). On the other hand, some media organisations expect politicians to extend favourable treatment to their reporters. Otherwise, the government official or establishment may risk a blackout of their activities in the media. Again, all of these factors are consequential for the framing of corruption in the news.

Journalistic tools, such as codes of ethics, press councils, ombudspeople, media criticism in mass media including on social media such as Twitter and Facebook, correction boxes, letters to the editor, editorial blogs, are essential for journalists who intend to fulfil their watchdog function on behalf of the public. They are designed to promote transparency and weaken corruption and other negative practices among media professionals (Pellegata & Splendore, 2018).

However, the present thesis is more concerned with frame building by journalists who cover corruption stories, produce news stories that have the potential to cause shame or embarrassment to the political class, and preside over the court of public opinion in the exposition of corruption cases, all of which can shape and influence the political system.

⁷² The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) classifies Nigeria as a middle-income fragile state. According to the BBC Media Action Policy Briefing, fragile states are characterised by the existence of different politics, religions, or ethnicities, which makes “relationships between communities difficult, and where the building of shared identity can be especially challenging.”

2.4. Other studies on the anticorruption war in Nigeria

There are some specific issues which scholars have sought to address in research on the anticorruption war in Nigeria. They include the following studies:

- Threats to anticorruption campaigns in Nigeria (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011; Akpan, 2020)
- Why the war on corruption has not yielded the desired results (Adesoji & Rotimi, 2008; Ojo, 2019; Nwozor, Olarewaju, Oshewolo & Ake, 2020; Abdulrauf, 2020)
- How anticorruption agencies and other levels of government participate in the crusade against corruption (Folarin, 2009; Nwaodu, Adam, Okereke, 2014; Nyewusira & Nweke, 2017)
- Strategies to combat corruption (Suberu, 2018; Arowolo & Olaniyan, 2018)
- The effectiveness of strategies to confront corruption in Nigeria (Okafor, Opara & Adebisi, 2020)
- How civil society organisations participate in the anticorruption crusade in Nigeria (Aderounmu, 2011)
- The acceptability of plea bargains in the anticorruption war in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2018)
- Public perceptions of the anticorruption crusade (Nnane, 2013; Oriola, Ojomo & Kolade, 2017)

Many of these studies draw on narrative and historical archives to analyse the war on corruption. In addition, the academic literature on corruption in Nigeria mostly originates from political science, economics, sociology, and communication. However, a common element across studies and disciplines is a widespread understanding of the significant and detrimental effects of corruption on society. Research from these core social science fields has examined the consequences of corruption in Nigeria, which has been consistently linked to pervasive

poverty and poor governance resulting from leadership challenges. Several studies have also touched on the origins of corruption, ethics and corruption, corruption in public institutions and industry, curbing corruption, legal instruments, the fight against corruption, and anticorruption campaigns.

Regarding journalism or communication research on corruption, the predominant perspective is that the Nigerian media effectively performs its surveillance function in the promotion of good governance. Ngene (2016) examined newspaper readers' perceptions of anticorruption campaigns in Nigeria and acknowledged the significant role of the press in performing a watchdog function through editorials against corruption. Ngene noted that this coverage positively impacted audience attitudes and behaviours; thus, anticorruption reporting must reach rural areas, where most Nigerians live.

However, it is important to note that, as a major instrument of mass communication, the radio is very important in Nigeria because of low literacy levels among citizens and the medium's affordability and accessibility. In addition to state-owned radio stations in all of the country's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, privately owned radio stations with different political and cultural leanings have begun to emerge all over Nigeria, especially in the South West, which is dominated by the Yoruba population. In addition, many Nigerians can now afford mobile phones, on which they can also listen to the radio whenever and wherever they want. For example, it is now a common to see petty traders and artisans, such as carpenters, bricklayers, labourers, and commercial motorcycle riders, with earphones plugged into their mobile handsets and dangling from their ears. Thus, radio broadcasts of corruption-related news content, which is usually generated from newspaper reviews and transmitted in English and indigenous languages, are guaranteed and also subject to media framing.

Prior to Ngene's study, Nnaane (2013) used a survey to assess public perceptions and the role of the media in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. A majority of respondents agreed that the Nigerian media played a positive role in fighting corruption. Moreover, Oriola, Ojomo, and Kolade (2017) examined the link between newspaper framing and public perceptions of Buhari's anticorruption campaign. Based on a survey of 1,200 respondents in three states in southwestern Nigeria and a content analysis of 1,169 front-page stories from selected national newspapers, they found a positive and significant relationship between newspaper framing and public perceptions of the anticorruption campaign, as participants mostly rated the crusade as "fair." However, in a study on newspaper framing of the anticorruption war in selected Nigerian newspapers, Salaudeen, Adebisi, and Sanni (2018) noted that corruption stories were not prominently featured despite being widely featured in news outlets. This contradiction was intended to mean treating corruption as a focal message because the researchers advocated that prominence should be given to anticorruption stories by the Nigerian media to promote what they called the "policy agenda."

The current author also identified "uncompromising" and "witch-hunting" frames in editorials in Nigerian newspapers on the first anniversary of Buhari's assumption of office (Abubakre, 2017). This study established that the Nigerian media's stance on issues such as anticorruption was subject to ethnic and political considerations. Similarly, Igwebuike's (2017) assessment of the Nigerian articles on corruption were neutral.

Nwammuo, Nwafor, and Onuoama (2016) focused on Nigerian journalists' perspectives of the framing of corruption allegations under the Buhari administration in a citizen journalism portal called *Sahara Reporters*. The researchers stated that the portal set the stage for the "media trials" of individuals accused of corruption even before they were convicted in a court of law, thereby creating bias and subjudice. They also examined journalists' use of sources in the

reporting of news on corruption from 2000 to 2006 and found that they frequently employed government or official sources which favoured the official definition of corruption (Ciboh, 2014). Moreover, Okoro and Chinweobo-Onuoha (2013) examined corruption in journalism by considering Nigerian journalists' perceptions of brown envelope journalism and its implications for journalism practice in Nigeria. According to the study, journalists identified greed as the main reason for soliciting incentives such as brown envelopes, which influence the content that journalists produce. Consequently, the Nigerian media industry's credibility, which it needs to perform its watchdog function, is weakened (Babasola, 2017).

After examining a range of academic literature on media coverage and corruption, the researcher found that many studies, particularly in Nigeria, broadly focus on two main categories media coverage and corruption. The first is the fulfilment of journalism's watchdog function to hinder the spread of corruption in society; the second is ethics and corruption among Nigerian journalists, which was primarily defined as receiving "brown envelopes" (rewards) for news coverage.

2.5. Global media coverage and corruption

Some studies on mainstream Western journalism and European countries have centred on media effects, journalistic practices, and trust in political institutions. Others addressed media and corruption coverage, but few have focused on how journalists frame corruption. In what could be regarded as a precursor to frame-building processes in journalism, Pellegata and Splendore (2018) considered how the perceived spread of corruption in the public sector affected journalistic practice and how journalists conducted their work to effectively inform members of society. They suggested that journalists who live and work in a political and social environment characterised by high levels of corruption "appear to be structurally unable" to perform their watchdog function and noted that such journalists have less confidence in the

impact of media accountability instruments such as codes of ethics and ombudspersons. They further held that “the higher the level of corruption in a country, the higher the journalists’ perception of government pressures” (Pellegata & Splendore, 2018, p.577).

In well-established democracies such as the United Kingdom and France, coverage of corruption in the news media is often seen from a more external perspective which emphasizes international cases of corruption in foreign countries. In relatively young democracies such as Italy, corruption is often portrayed as a major problem in national politics and public administration (Mancini, Mazzoni, Cornia & Marchetti, 2016). Corruption in Italy is considered a systemic problem and a prevalent norm which deflects from personal responsibility and accountability (Berti, 2018). By contrast, corruption in China is viewed as a matter of the convicted individual’s “personal problems and lack of self-discipline” (Zhu & Shi, 2012, p.927).

China is renowned for its tight control of mass media, unlike in liberal, Anglo-Saxon, and Western democracies. Thus, the nature of the state may affect how the media covers corruption issues and how citizens perceive it. There is empirical evidence to show that informal communication channels, such as rumours, which many Chinese citizens do rely on, have become salient in the conversations on corruption and the Chinese government’s anticorruption discourse. Zhu and Shi (2012) showed that news from unofficial sources (e.g., rumours) flourish and that those who consume such news perceive corruption as a serious problem. On the other hand, when members of the public receive news via official channels, they tend to view corruption as the responsibility of the indicted individual. The researchers submitted that media coverage on corruption “diluted or even ‘defeated’ the detrimental effects of grapevine rumours” (p.938).

Focusing on corruption coverage, Yushau (2010) investigated the factors that affect journalism practice in Nigeria. He established that journalism practice is subject to regional parallelism in terms of ethnic, sectional, political, and religious differences. However, he highlighted that this “is not absolute” (2010, p.363). This is not unexpected because of the cumulative effects of the military coups of 1963 and 1966 and the Nigerian Civil War of 1967, which have lingered in the political affairs of the country. This scenario is often reflected in ethnic and religious considerations in affairs of governance.

2.6. The present study

The present thesis seeks to build on Yushau’s 2010 research, among other studies cited above, by examining the role of the mainstream print media in the fight against corruption under the current Nigerian government, which came into power on the strength of an anticorruption campaign. It differs from other works by examining the journalistic agency involved in the anticorruption crusade; this is paramount for understanding journalism practice in Nigeria. More recently, Komolafe, Nkereuwem and Kalu-Amah (2019, p.14) have dismissed media coverage of corruption in Nigeria as “tabloidization,” construing it as “a mere regurgitation” of courtroom proceedings, albeit with added sensationalism. This provides further justification for this research. The current researcher considers this perspective to be rather narrow because the authors appeared to overlook journalistic choices involved in the reporting of such issues. Frames in corruption stories can affect how citizens think about corruption. Thus, one of the case studies presented in this thesis is used to explore what makes reporting corruption newsworthy and assess journalism professionals’ understanding of the government’s anticorruption crusade.

CHAPTER 3

3.0. Political economy of the Nigerian media

3.1. Introduction

The current chapter provides a contextual overview of the contemporary Nigerian media environment. It also provides a basis for the selection of media outlets highlighted in this research. One popular way that businessmen (some of whom are politicians) seek to express their views, in the political sphere is to establish a newspaper and employ a popular journalist to shepherd it. When a newspaper's editorial content is always almost on point, the result is that the newspaper becomes popular. Often, these ventures fail; thus, the newspaper industry in Nigeria is reported to have a short lifespan. Various scholars have examined the origins of the Nigerian media's political orientation and nature as a weapon of nationalism. This often neglects its economic and commercial history.

Financial independence is central to the media's watchdog function, particularly in a society that champions an anticorruption crusade; this cannot be overemphasised. Regarding the economic factors that shape political news, Perloff (2016, p. 230) discussed the "tension" between the media's role in attempting to cater to "system-maintaining economic forces and cultivating the time-honoured ethos of speaking truth to power." In other words, the quest to ensure accountability in a political system is a cardinal obligation and a social function of journalism. However, this social function must be backed by a strong financial model.

While the mainstream Nigerian press is predominantly privately owned, broadcast media is largely government-owned. This thesis focuses on print media because of its influence on the national discourse from the preindependence period to the postindependence era in Nigeria.

3.2. The Colonial Office and nationalist pressmen

The profit-oriented approach to newspaper business in Nigeria stems from the establishment of the *Daily Times* in 1926. Some European members of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce collaborated with a wealthy and influential Nigerian, Sir Adeyemo Alakija, to establish the newspaper in opposition to Herbert Macaulay's nationalist-owned *Lagos Daily News*. The *Daily Times'* board of directors and shareholders were united by financial interests. Beyond supporting the economic progress of Nigeria, the editorial policy of the newspaper was unaligned with any creed or party.

Obafemi Awolowo, one of Nigeria's foremost statesmen and a former reporter at the *Daily Times*, would later portray the newspaper as "an unpardonably dull journalistic and literary product" compared to the thriving *West African Pilot*, which he described as "a fire-eating and aggressive nationalist paper of the first order" (cited in Derrick, 2018, p.245). The *West African Pilot* was founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe, who had studied in the United States and considered journalism a vocation. He was more an astute politician who understood the politics of the time than a professional journalist. Macaulay and Azikiwe cofounded a political party called the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1944, with the Macaulay serving as chairman and Azikiwe serving as secretary general.

To survive the challenges that confronted his newsroom, Azikiwe cultivated friendships among those who mattered, like Sir Bernard

Bourdillon, the colonial governor of Nigeria. He became so popular that his publication was tolerated even by some colonial governors. Azikiwe benefited immensely from his relationships with the latter, especially with regard to his newspaper enterprise (see Flint, 1999, p.150-151).

Newspapers edited by Azikiwe were reputed for their commercial success. For instance, in 1936, while serving as the editor of the *African Morning Post* in Accra, Gold Coast (now Ghana), circulation grew from 2,000 to 10,000 copies per day. The newspaper focused on “politicizing a mass audience with simple, hard-hitting, and often scurrilous language, designed to be read aloud by literates to illiterates” (Flint, 1999, p.146).

With the *West African Pilot*, which was established in 1937 and published by Azikiwe’s Zik Press Limited, Azikiwe was able to replicate his success at the *African Morning Post*. By 1939, circulation had reached 10,000 copies per day. Azikiwe went on to establish a series of publications under the Zik Group of Newspapers in February 1940.

However, colonial officials adopted punitive measures against newspapers, which included withholding advertisements from Azikiwe’s papers and the non-renewal of the wireless license through which he received news reports as Reuter’s agent for British West Africa. His was the only indigenous media outlet, the *West African Pilot*, that could afford to subscribe to the service (see Newell 2016, p.312-313). Known for championing egalitarian ideals, antiracist principles, and human rights, Azikiwe opposed the sanctions by sending several letters of protest to the Colonial Office in England. Beyond the newspaper business, Azikiwe

expanded into other commercial ventures, including establishing the African Continental Bank (ACB) in 1944.

Azikiwe's contemporary and closest political rival in the south was Obafemi Awolowo, a lawyer by training. He made inroads into journalism and the newspaper industry with the publication of the *Nigerian Tribune* in 1949. The newspaper consistently championed the political interests of its proprietor and the southwestern region. It is now the oldest privately owned newspaper in the country. In the 1960s, Awolowo's political party, the Action Group, asked Fleet Street media mogul Roy Thomson to invest in print media outlets that were well-disposed to publicising the region's interests. However, it was not an entirely successful relationship due to the tense political atmosphere of the period. As one commentator noted,

Action Group leaders were not the best business partners. They clashed with Thomson and the ruling party, which led to some of them being jailed on treason charges, while others just wound up broke. That left Thomson paying all the bills. (Jenks, 2016, p. 10)

The friendship between Rupert East, a colonial official, and Abubakar Imam, an educated northerner, led to the formation of the Gaskiya Corporation, which published *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo*. It was largely financed by the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund established in the aftermath of World War II (Furniss, 2011). Imam became the editor of *Gaskiya*. However, East's liberal aspirations soon clashed with the board members' profit-making imperatives. Conflicts arose over the newspaper commercial viability, which resulted in East losing his position as chairman (see Furniss, 2011). By 1948, the English edition of the newspaper was published under the name *Nigerian Citizen*, which became the *New Nigerian* during the independence period. It was seen as the mouthpiece of the

north and prominent northern politicians such as Tafawa Balewa and Sir Ahmadu Bello. The newspaper competed favourably with those established in the south.

In 1935, the *Daily Times* was acquired by a shrewd European businessman, Robert B. Paul, who managed West African Newspapers Limited. The company also owned two magazines: *West Africa* and the *West African Review* (Derrick, 2018, p.234). This development was expected to “counteract the influence of the increasingly belligerent nationalist press” (Chick, 1996, p.379). However, little success was recorded on this front, as the change of ownership led to a decline in the readership of the *Daily Times*.

Cecil Harmsworth King took charge of the *Daily Times* following its acquisition by the Mirror Group of London in 1947. He favoured the liberal norms of British colonial rule in running the newspaper. On employer-employee relationships, King stated, “Our relations with our African staff are of the greatest importance to the continued success of the paper and even apparent high-handedness can do the firm permanent harm . . . It is no use our prating on about Africanisation in the paper if we do not practice it in the paper” (cited in Chick, 1996, p.383).

At its peak in 1975, the *Daily Times*’ weekday issues sold up to 275,000 copies per day, while its *Sunday Times* issue sold 400,000 copies per day. Oso (1991, p. 44) wrote that the commercialisation of the *Daily Times* led to the “gradual depoliticisation of the Nigerian press” and subsequently shaped the organisation and production of news. In 1973, the federal military government took control of the newspaper by acquiring 60% of its shares and those of the *New Nigerian* under a military decree. According to the government, this acquisition was intended to underline its “policy of full support of press freedom at all times” (*New Nigerian*, 1975, p.14). Subsequent actions by the government (under military and democratic leadership)

proved otherwise, especially with the introduction of draconian antipress laws in 1984. At the time, the editorial culture of the Nigerian media was seen as devolving to “slavish and virtually sycophantic mega-phones of the government or of the party in control” (Ayodele, 1988, p.110).

After the transition from military dictatorship to a democratic dispensation in 1999, the *Daily Times*, was sold to a private investor called Folio Communications Limited in 2004. Prior to its acquisition by the investor, the federal government owned 96.05% of the *Daily Times*' equity. At the 90th anniversary of the newspaper in 2016, the chairman of Folio Communications, Fidelis Anosike, stated, “We have quietly reinvented and reinvigorated the newspaper toward providing leadership in quality news dissemination for Nigerian youths, the political and business elites.” However, with frequent changes of ownership, the *Daily Times* lost the influence that it once commanded in the Nigerian media industry.

As a viable media enterprise, the *Daily Times* prompted the establishment of other newspapers during the early 1970s and 1980s, especially in the South West of Nigeria. With the takeover of the influential newspapers in the north, *New Nigerian* and the south, *Daily Times*, by the military government, Private individuals especially the politicians, saw this takeover as a calculated attempt by the military rulers to render the society voiceless. In reaction, they rose to the occasion and provided somewhat credible news alternatives to restore voice back to the people. These news outlets canvassed the change of power from military dictatorship to civilian leadership. Around this period, a wave of young, well-trained journalists with university degrees emerged; they were smart, bold, and prepared to criticise the military rulers. These journalists were groomed by Babatunde Jose, the editor-in-chief of the *Daily Times* in the early 1970s, to become independent reporters and columnists (Duodu, 2008). Jose himself had been a beloved protégé of Cecil King.

However, the proprietors of some emerging news outlets did not mind the absolute powers which the military wielded against the Nigerian people. Such newspapers and magazines established around this time included *The Punch* in 1971; the Concord Group of newspapers and their flagship publication, *National Concord*, in 1980; *The Guardian* in 1983; *Newswatch* in 1984; *Vanguard* in 1984; and *Tell* in 1991. Except for *Concord* and *Newswatch*, all the other publications are still in existence. Media practitioners at these organisations provided useful data for the present study.

Two years after *Newswatch* was established, its editor, Dele Giwa, was assassinated via a letter bomb; the military rulers were the main suspects. Dele Olojede was one of Giwa's protégés and a close associate. In sympathy, the U.S. Ford Foundation sponsored Olojede to enrol at Columbia University for a journalism degree. He worked for several years at *Newsday* before returning to Nigeria in 2007 to establish the Next newspaper group, which thrived for four years before halting publication. More recently, Dapo Olorunyomi, who admired both Giwa and Olojede, established his own online newspaper, *Premium Times*, in 2011. It is now one of the most vibrant newspapers in Nigeria.

3.3. Structural adjustment programme and the Nigerian media market

Upon independence, agricultural produce was the mainstay of Nigeria's income. There was cocoa, coffee, and rubber from the west; palm oil and palm kernel from the east; and groundnut and cotton from the north. Nationalist governments received money from cocoa boards and other agricultural boards to fund their political parties and newspapers. Farmers were expected to produce while receiving a fraction of the export proceeds from their products. Nationalist elites utilised these revenues to

fund their political activities, which made agricultural activities unprofitable and triggered rural migration to the cities. This movement was aided by the oil boom of the late 1960s to the 1970s, which led the head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, to declare that Nigeria's problem was not money but how to spend it (see Odunfa, 2010; Legum, 1975).

Thus, Nigeria became a mass importer of goods, including agricultural products which had been hitherto exported. Under these circumstances and with the domestic impact of a global economic recession in the early 1980s, newsprint imports were banned by media organisations under the Buhari military regime. With the structural adjustment programme (SAP) introduced by the Babangida military government in 1986 on behalf of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the purchasing power of many Nigerians significantly declined. Spending on newspapers fell sharply, leading many outlets to reduce their print runs by over 50%. Citing data obtained from the Annual Report and Statement of Account of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Olukotun (2004) noted that the rate of inflation ballooned from 7.4% in 1990 to 44.6% in 1992 and 57% in 1994. Between 1994 and 1997, more than 32 press publications closed because of the harsh economics of production, unfriendly economic policies, and political persecution of privately owned publications by the government. Since then, newspaper circulation figures in Nigeria have remained shrouded in secrecy. The Audit Bureau of Circulation in Nigeria, which should provide credible data about the media industry, has barely operated and is currently in a state of comatose.

3.4. Political economy of the Nigerian media after the transition from a military regime to a civilian administration (1999–2019)

3.4.1. The challenge of circulation figures

The Nigeria newspaper industry is often characterised by its national orientation and outlook. “As at today, the combined total of newspaper sales in this country is just about 150,000 copies,” according to Dapo Olorunyomi, a veteran journalist and the publisher of Nigeria’s leading online newspaper, *Premium Times*, in an interview with the current researcher.⁷³ However, the data about newspaper circulation figures in Nigeria remain opaque. In 2009, the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN), in collaboration with the Association of Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria (AAPN) and Media Independent Practitioners Association of Nigeria (MIPAN), published a report on Nigerian newspaper sales, which generated furore in the newspaper industry. Only one major newspaper, *The Nation*, acknowledged the existence of this report on its website.⁷⁴ Data for the controversial report were obtained from 15 leading newspapers in the country; the findings revealed that newspaper sales in Nigeria amounted to less than 300,000 copies per day. However, these newspapers had installed printing presses in various parts of the country that were designed to print 1 million or more copies each per day.

According to the report, which was ignored by newspaper proprietors, *The Punch* was the best-selling newspaper in the country with a daily circulation of 34,264. *The Nation* was ranked second, and *The Sun* placed third with 25,532 copies per day. In addition, the *Vanguard* recorded 25,241 copies per day, *The Guardian* recorded 25,222 copies per day, and *ThisDay* recorded 21,703 copies per day. *Daily Trust*, with a readership predominantly located in northern Nigeria, and the *Nigerian Tribune*, the country’s oldest newspaper recorded only 11,672 and 8,314 copies, respectively. The Newspaper Proprietors of Nigeria (NPAN) argued

⁷³ Abubakre, F.I. (2019) Interview conducted with *Premium Times* Publisher Dapo Olorunyomi on March 12, 2019

⁷⁴ See *The Nation* website <https://thenationonline.net/about-us/>

that the ADVAN report did not consider newspaper sales from subscriptions. Quoting Dele Sobowale, a member of the team that put together the report, Ekeng (2011; cited by Ariyibi-Oke, 2011)⁷⁵ disclosed that some newspaper proprietors were uncooperative during the report's development. Sobowale advocated for the merger of newspapers in Nigeria, as in the banking industry, to improve managerial efficiency. In 2004, the Central Bank of Nigeria undertook a reform of the banking sector; commercial banks were asked to recapitalise their operating capital from 2 billion naira to 25 billion naira within a stipulated period. This led to different mergers and acquisitions by the banks; as a result, the number of commercial banks in Nigeria decreased from 89 to 25 (Ojukwu-Ogba, 2009). In 2006, 13 commercial banks that failed to recapitalise or merge with other banks were liquidated.

3.4.2. The impact of affordable digital technology

In the mid-1990s, internet penetration via globalisation reshaped the media ecology in Nigeria and became an important source of news for many citizens, especially the huge youth population. In a 2017 report, the Freedom House estimated the country's internet penetration rate at 47.7%.⁷⁶ In March 2019, the Nigerian Communications Commission reported on its website that the number of internet users had grown by 1,212,868 new subscribers within a month: from 114,725,357 users in February 2019 to 115,938,225 users in March 2019. Currently, Nigeria has the youngest population in the world. According to data released by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Library, as of April 2019, the proportion of Nigerian children under age 14 was 42.5%, the proportion of Nigerians between ages 15 and 64 amounted to 54.29%, and the proportion of Nigerians 65 years or older was 3.2% (Cia.gov, 2019). This

⁷⁵ ADVAN'S Newspaper Circulation Report: Why the Figures Remain Controversial. Retrieved from <https://poisemedianigeria.com/advans-newspaper-circulation-report-why-the-figures-remain-controversial/>

⁷⁶ See Freedom of the Press 2017, retrieved from Freedom House website, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/nigeria>

means that news audiences in Nigeria are now mostly online, partly thanks to highly affordable communication devices that were mass-produced by China for a huge population like Nigeria.⁷⁷

According to the 2019 Nigeria Mobile Report by Jumia, Nigeria's foremost e-commerce platform, Nigeria is the only African country to contribute 4% of the estimated 700 million new global mobile subscribers by 2025. According to the report, "28 million new mobile subscribers will emerge from Nigeria between 2019 and 2025, that is, an average of 7 million new mobile subscribers annually." The report further stated that the influx of smartphones, particularly those from Asian brands such as Fero, Samsung, and Tecno that are specifically targeted to the Nigerian market, is responsible for the gradual decrease in the average price of smartphones, from \$216 USD in 2014 to \$95 USD in 2018 (Kolawole, 2019).⁷⁸

Over the past two decades, major Nigerian newspapers have undertaken a digital migration to the internet. This transition has had far-reaching changes in the Nigerian media-public sphere, given that media audiences are mostly online complemented by a significant dependence on Whatsapp platform as a major means of communication (Job, 2021). In addition to the comment sections of online newspapers, digital social media platforms such as Twitter have become a major source of real-time news. They not only provide information about politics, business, foreign affairs, sports, entertainment, and other areas but also serve as a platform for interaction and debate.

In a study of northern and southern newspapers represented by the *Daily Trust* and *The Punch*, respectively, Ahmad and Jimoh (2015, p.28) established that the internet has not posed a threat to the survival of newspapers in Nigeria. Rather, it has aided the survival of newspapers by

⁷⁷ Dahir, A. L. 2018 A low-profile, Chinese handset maker has taken over Africa's mobile market. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/africa/1374404/chinas-transsion-dominates-africas-phone-market-with-tecno-itel/>

⁷⁸ See Kolawole, O. (2019) Nigeria Mobile Report 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.jumia.com.ng/mobile-report/>

attracting online readers. However, the authors advocated for newspaper organisations in the country to adopt “new media for the benefit of winning the market and by extension, survival.”

3.4.3. Effective work force, journalists’ remuneration, and political interference

The importance of quality and effective manpower in the smooth running of a media organisation cannot be overemphasised, as the relationship between journalists and media owners plays an important role in the production of media content. Although news production and journalism are big business and continues to enjoy a high status around the world, this has not been reflected in the earnings of news workers in Nigeria. Although many authors have documented the history of the poor remuneration of Nigerian journalists (Eribo, 1996; Olaniyan, 2008; Arogundade, 2011), little has been recorded about the impact of media ownership (both government and private) on journalists’ job satisfaction. Nigeria’s vice-president and a professor of law, Yemi Osibajo,⁷⁹ stated that “it is now accepted that the journalist who is able to afford a decent existence either owns the medium, has another job where his income comes from or has learnt to be innovative with being a journalist.”

Regarding survival, journalists in Nigeria are not well-paid. On June 8, 2016, Nduka Obaigbena, the chairman of Leaders and Company Limited, a media organisation which runs the Abuja-based *ThisDay* newspaper and the Arise television network, dismissed 13 *ThisDay* employees who had previously issued a strike notice to compel the management to clear a backlog of unpaid salaries (Ogundipe, 2016).

Similarly, in January 2016, journalists from the Lagos-based *Daily Newswatch*, *Newswatch*, and *National Mirror*, stormed a corporate event in Abuja attended by the publisher, Jimoh

⁷⁹ Osinbajo made this remark during an event to celebrate the 50th birthday of Nigerian journalist Kadaria Ahmed in December 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDpON3v0x-Q>. See also: Ogunmade, O. (2017) Osinbajo: No journalist can make ends meet in Nigeria. *ThisDay* 19 December 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2017/12/19/osinbajo-no-journalist-can-make-ends-meet-in-nigeria/>

Ibrahim, with megaphones and placards to protest 13 months of unpaid salaries. This drew the ire of Ibrahim, who fired the managing director of the companies, Bolu Afolayan, on the spot. The event was captured on live television (Awojobi, 2016). Earlier in 2014, the management of the *New Nigerian Compass* had instituted a policy that required journalists to submit two pages of paid advertisement placements per month as a condition for receiving their salaries (Ezeamalu, 2014), crossing the Chinese wall so to speak!

Delays in the payment of workers' salaries hinder efficiency in job performance and have been a prominent theme in Nigeria. Little has been done in terms of legal responses, as both government- and privately owned media establishments are guilty of delays in providing salaries and entitlements to media workers. Consequently, journalists are unable to meet their social and financial obligations, which can result in disaffection between them and their employers (i.e., media proprietors). This has led many journalists to engage in unethical practices such as seeking bribes, which limits their capacity to hold political office holders to account. Therefore, it is unclear how journalists who operate in a social environment characterised by endemic corruption are expected to effectively monitor the political system to curtail corruption, which has made Nigeria the headquarters of poverty⁸⁰ in the world.

By contrast, media owners continue to live a flamboyant lifestyle, which apparently and even really is not supported through the sales of newspapers and in some cases advertisements. In the morning daily newspapers, it is not uncommon to find newspaper editorials that are critical of the government; however, by evening of the same day, the media organisation may hold an award ceremony at one of Nigeria's most exotic hotels to confer awards on government

⁸⁰ Citing a report by the Brookings Institute, CNN reported that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty. It is estimated that around half of the population live on less than \$1.90 a day. See Adebayo, B. (2018) Nigeria overtakes India in extreme poverty ranking' June, retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/26/africa/nigeria-overtakes-india-extreme-poverty-intl/index.html>

functionaries and prominent businessmen whose performance they had criticised in the editorials, especially those with links to the government. This situation has contributed to the waning credibility of the Nigerian media, particularly in view of its expected watchdog function of holding the nation's leaders to account (Adelakun, 2018).⁸¹ This is why Carey (2003) stressed the importance of ethics in journalism, as he points out:

When journalists measure their success or their ethics by the size of their readership or their audience, by the profits of their companies or by their incomes, status, and visibility, they have caved into the temptation of worshipping false gods. They have sold their heritage for pottage, as completely as those who cynically convinced themselves they were serving democracy by acting as the mouthpiece of a putatively revolutionary party. (p.3).

The efforts of the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Dele Olojede should also be mentioned. He attempted to address the ills of Nigerian journalism that arise from the country's political economy by launching a newspaper called *Next* in 2007. He was a protégé of the late Dele Giwa, the founding editor of *Newswatch*, who was assassinated in 1986 during the Babangida administration. After Giwa's death, the military government shut down *Newswatch*. Around this time, the Ford Foundation took an interest in Olojede and paid for him to leave the country; he went on to complete journalism training at Columbia University on scholarship, then worked for *Newsday* in the United States for many years.

Using his skills and experience as a journalist, Olojede to empower the people through the provision of factual information which would enable them to make informed decisions as part of a democratic system. The publication was shut down in 2011. At first, journalists who worked at *Next* were highly remunerated going by Nigerian standards. During its short

⁸¹ See Adelakun, A. (2018) The banality of politicised awards. April 19, back page Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/the-banality-of-politicised-awards/>

existence, the newspaper established its reputation by consistently unearthing acts of corruption perpetrated by the elite political class, a venture that other mainstream media did not dare to attempt. These stories included the Halliburton scandal, in which previous Nigerian presidents were named as bribe takers, and the secrecy surrounding the health of a former president, Umaru Yar'Adua, before his eventual death in office.

In an interview years after the demise of *Next*, Olojede admitted that it had been a “strategic error” to have sourced funds from Nigeria to launch the newspaper. He could have easily leveraged his wide network as a Pulitzer Prize winner and a journalist who had worked in the United States for many years to raise foreign capital for the venture:

A strategic error in the sense that the political and business elites were able to put pressure on my investors since they had most of their businesses in other sectors of the economy whether it was oil, telecoms, or banking and so on, so if they couldn't put pressure on me directly, they could put pressure on them which they went on to do. Just because you [a prominent businessman]⁸² invested two million dollars in *Next* doesn't mean you want to jeopardize your 400 million dollars investment in some oil well somewhere, so that was what they used really to eventually fatally wound *Next* by peeling off my investors from the enterprise, so when we inevitably ran into financial trouble, it was difficult to rely on the people who had been there from the beginning because of all these external pressures mainly political, and fairly, quite brazen blackmail against the shareholders. (Fawehinmi, 2017)

This excerpt demonstrates that the Nigerian media is in deep crisis especially from the perspective of managerial economics. As Bourne (2018) indicated, the “overall state of the Nigerian media is far from healthy, suffering from corruption and the downside of a powerful digital revolution which is changing the reporting of news and features throughout the democratic world” (p.171).

⁸² Through informal sources, the author of this thesis determined that the businessman referred to in this quotation is most likely Mike Adenuga, a Nigerian billionaire with huge investments in the petroleum, banking, and telecommunications sectors.

3.5. Representative sample of newspapers selected for research

For the purposes of this thesis, the daily newspapers that were chosen as representative samples for the Nigerian mainstream media are *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, *Daily Trust*, and *Premium Times*. The latter is an online newspaper and the newest in the group. The first three publications are based in Lagos, while the last three publications are based in Abuja. All the selected daily newspapers have an online presence and represent a wide range of political opinions. They were chosen based on their influence, quality, and geographical reach.

3.5.1 *The Punch*

The Punch is a daily newspaper founded in 1971 by two friends: James Olu Aboderin, an accountant, and Sam Amuka, a journalist who was formerly with the *Daily Times*. Amuka served as the editor of the *Sunday Times*, one of the titles in the *Daily Times* stable, between 1967 and 1971. While Aboderin provided the financial outlay, Amuka provided editorial guidance. Eventually, they parted ways, and Amuka established *Vanguard*. Amuka was the first managing director of *The Punch*. The newspaper was subsequently managed by the relatives and children of the late Aboderin, and it is one of the most respected daily newspapers in the country. *The Punch* has printing presses in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, which is located in the heart of the oil-rich South geopolitical zone. Thus, its reach is nationwide; its influence in the South is particularly prominent. *The Punch* is reader-friendly in terms of its print, graphics, and colours. Audience members come from all classes, which means that *The Punch* is read by a wide variety of Nigerians; newspaper vendors confirm that *The Punch* is the best-selling newspaper.

The Nigerian Media Advertising Guide rates *The Punch* as the best-selling newspaper in Lagos. Although *The Punch* estimates its circulation at 80,000 copies per day, informal findings from the current researcher's interviews with media advertising executives and editors (who declined

to be named) put this number between 20,000 and 25,000 copies per day, which is the highest of any newspaper in Nigeria. However, in the digital sphere, *The Punch* also reaches a global audience with a self-reported 3.5 million social media followers. According to data obtained from Alexa Reports on April 15, 2019, the daily time spent on *The Punch*'s website was 6.49.

Although most advertisements in *The Punch* originate from the federal government, especially its ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), the office of the president has had cause to criticise the newspaper at various times. It has accused *The Punch* of bias based on its position on many social issues, such as the fight against corruption and the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. It also receives advertisements from many private companies, which commission their advertisements through advertising agencies and private individuals. As a newspaper of record, *The Punch* was awarded “Newspaper of the Year”⁸³ by the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence (DAME). It won the award on seven occasions: in 2004, 2006, from 2010 to 2013, and in 2018. *The Punch* was chosen as a source of data for this study because it is one of the most respected daily newspapers in the country.

3.5.2 *The Nation*

The Nation is believed to be owned by the strongman of Nigerian politics, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, and is published by Vintage Press Limited. Tinubu, who is also believed to own Television Continental Broadcasting Service (TVC), a 24-hour television station, is the national leader of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).⁸⁴ With Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, Tinubu served as governor of Lagos State. From 1999 to 2007, he led the opposition party until 2015, when his party, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) from the South West, merged

⁸³ See <http://dameawards.com/index.php/newspaper-of-the-year/>

⁸⁴ Tinubu usually employs the services of his proxies to run his media establishments. This is common knowledge in Nigeria media sphere. The publisher of Premium Times, Dapo Olorunyomi who once worked with the TVC also disclosed this in an interview with the current researcher.

with Buhari's party, the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) from the North West; the All Nigerian Progressives Party (ANPP) from the North East; and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) from the South East. The merger led to the creation of the APC in February 2013; the party went on to defeat the ruling party at the time, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), in the 2015 presidential elections. In the build-up to the elections, *The Nation* provided tremendously positive media coverage to the APC and cast its presidential flagbearer, Buhari, as having the ability to fight corruption. Indeed, *The Nation* was chosen as a data source for this thesis because of the extensive political influence commanded by its proprietor, particularly in the South West and in the ruling party. Underscoring this influence, a newspaper columnist named Niran Adedokun (2018) wrote, "In today's Nigeria, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu . . . is one of those who speak, and everyone listens." According to records obtained from the database of the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), the organisation tasked with registering companies in Nigeria, Vintage Press Limited was registered on November 23, 1990. However, it was not until July 31, 2006 that *The Nation* was launched and the newspaper own printing presses in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. The newspaper's target audience is policy makers and upwardly mobile and educated business and political elite who occupy leadership positions.

According to the 2018–2019 edition of the Nigerian Media Advertising Guide, *The Nation* is the second most-read daily newspaper in Lagos, after *The Punch*, the third most-read in Abuja, and the second most-read in Port Harcourt. According to data obtained from Alexa Reports on April 15, 2019, the time spent daily on *The Nation*'s website is 5.24. The newspaper won the 2018 "Newspaper of the Year" award from the NMMA. Its stated mission is to "serve as an independent monitor of power and hold those entrusted with its exercise accountable." This editorial claim may seem ironic since its proprietor or its political ally controls some branches of governance in Nigeria. However, it is important to note that this claim cannot be outright

dismissed because *The Nation* was used by a former opposition party to defeat the government 16 years prior to the 2015 general elections.

3.5.3. *Daily Trust*

Daily Trust is published by the Media Trust Limited, a company comprised of 20 shareholders, in addition to the staff's shares. It is led by Chairman Mallam Kabiru Yusuf, a former editor of the defunct *Triumph* newspaper based in Kano and southern Africa correspondent for the BBC. Media Trust Limited began operations in Kaduna, northwestern Nigeria on March 20, 1998, with *Weekly Trust* as its first title. At its inception under military rule, stakeholders were concerned about the sustainability of the project given that many newspapers in the north barely survived. In 2006, the company introduced a Hausa-language publication, *Aminiyya*, which is the most-read newspaper in Kano in the North West, according to the Nigerian Media Advertising Guide. Kano is the centre of commerce in northern Nigeria and has the highest voting population in the country, with over 6 million eligible voters. Thus, any individual who intends to contest the presidency of Nigeria must win Kano as well as Lagos.

Daily Trust is also the most-read daily newspaper in Abuja. It has printing presses in Lagos, Kano, Abuja, and Maiduguri. Not only is *Daily Trust* the largest newspaper in northern Nigeria (which is why it was selected for the present thesis), its corporate social responsibility schemes are also well-documented. They range from the provision of scholarships to medical students to the provision of support to orphanages and internally displaced people in the northern part of Nigeria. In an interview with *Daily Trust*'s online editor, Abiodun Alade,⁸⁵ the author of this thesis determined that the publication's monthly page views range from 8 to 10 million views and that its target audience is between the ages of 18 to 35. Alade further noted that advertisements mostly come from private individuals and organisations.

⁸⁵ Abubakre, F.I. (2019) Interview with Abiodun Alade, Daily Trust Online Advert Executive. March 2019

According to data obtained from exa Reports on April 15, 2019, the time spent daily on *Daily Trust*'s website is 4.34. *Daily Trust* was chosen for this research because of its high level of readership, particularly in the northern part of Nigeria (especially Abuja). The chairman of the media trust, Kabiru Yusuf,⁸⁶ disclosed that the newspaper does not accept advertisements from tobacco or liquor companies. Politically, he highlighted that the newspaper had been taken to court several times. However, he highlighted that this outlet's

overall aim was to do a product that has the acceptance of the market . . . every day, there are challenges. If it is a governor you displease, he would stop giving you advert but then, there are 36 of them and you can live with that. As long as the readers in the state take you seriously, he will come around.

Through the Daily Trust Foundation, the newspaper receives support from international donors such as the MacArthur Foundation to strengthen the capacity of journalists to conduct high-quality investigative and data-driven journalism to educate the public on corruption issues, particularly in the education and electricity sectors of Nigeria. In January 2019, the Nigerian Army shut down the *Daily Trust* offices in Abuja and Maiduguri. Moreover, the newspaper's northern regional editor, Uthman Abubakar, and a reporter, Ibrahim Sawab, were arrested based on its editorial stance and reporting on the fight against the terrorist group, Boko Haram, in the northern part of Nigeria. Before their release, the Nigerian Army stated in its defence that reports by the newspaper undermined national security. An old claim which lingers on, and which gives rise to serial questions such as who defines national security? Is it the courts or the military opinion, how does the rule of law come to play in what the military do in the fight against Boko Haram?

⁸⁶ Chairman of Media Trust Limited Kabiru Yusuf, speaks on 20 years anniversary of the birth of the Daily Trust. See "We started Daily Trust in one-room" retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/started-daily-trust-newspaper-one-room/>

3.5.4. *Vanguard*

Vanguard was founded in 1984 by Amuka, the first editor of the *Sunday Times* (1967–1971). The *Daily Vanguard*, along with its sister titles the *Saturday Vanguard* and the *Sunday Vanguard*, is a newspaper “that no serious policy maker, businessman, politician, student and/or interest groups would ignore,” according to a statement on its website. Before establishing *Vanguard*, Amuka played a key role in the development of *The Punch*’s editorial content and direction. He also served as editor of the *Sunday Punch* in 1973. Although *Vanguard* is a family-oriented newspaper, it was also created to appeal to the political class. The latter is evident from its annual “Personality of the Year Award,” which was designed for the patronage of the political and business class. Award categories include “Personality of the Year,” “Businessman of the Year,” “Governor of the Year,” “Banker of the Year,” and “Lifetime Achievement and Humanitarian Service.” The winners are selected by members of *Vanguard*’s board of editors. According to a statement on its website,⁸⁷ the newspaper’s daily circulation is 20,000 in Lagos and 12,000 in Abuja. Furthermore, it claims to distribute 15,000 copies in the South West, 25,000 copies in the South, 15,000 copies in the South East, 18,000 copies in North Central, 7,500 copies in the North East and 7,500 copies in the North West per day. Thus, *Vanguard*’s total daily circulation is estimated at 120,000, with a print run of 130,000.

However, data obtained through the researcher’s interviews with media advertising executives (who declined to be named) revealed that *Vanguard*’s current daily circulation is 11,000 in the South and the South East; 2,000 in Abuja and the rest of the north; and around 7,000 in Lagos. The Nigerian Media Advertising Guide reported that *Vanguard* is the third most-read newspaper in Port Harcourt after *The Nation* and *The Sun*. According to data obtained from

⁸⁷ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/about/>

Alexa Reports on April 15, 2019, the time spent daily on *Vanguard's* website is 5.30. In 2016, *Vanguard* was named best online newspaper of the year by the City People Social Media Awards. It also reached a global audience, with a self-reported 2.04 million followers on Twitter. Although it is based in Lagos, *Vanguard* was chosen for this research because of its appeal to the people of the South, which encompasses areas that form the stronghold of the main opposition party, the PDP.

Since the party lost power at the federal level in 2015, *Vanguard* has been at the forefront of criticising the Buhari administration on areas such as corruption, security, or the state of the economy. In June 2018, the chairman of the *Vanguard* editorial board, Ochereome Nnanna, who maintains a regular column in the newspaper, used an ethnic slur against the Yoruba of the South West. Nnanna, who is from the South East, described the Yoruba as “sophisticated morons”⁸⁸ in a Facebook thread after the federal government’s posthumous conferment of Nigeria’s highest honour on the late Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled presidential elections on June 12, 1993. Abiola died while in military detention in a quest to retrieve his mandate. Although the newspaper quickly dissociated itself from Nnanna’s stance, noting that his remarks did not reflect its institutional values, some social media users unearthed Nnanna’s past online activities to portray his alleged bigotry against the Yoruba ethnic group.⁸⁹ As Japeth Omojuwa, a social media influencer, indicated, “You can’t hold this much bile against an ethnic group, then go on to retain your position as Chairman, Editorial Board of a national newspaper. That is a timebomb right there. It’s like a bomb in the hands of a bigot.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Through his position, Nnanna expressed contempt for the political alliance between the South West and the north. Thus, he viewed the honour done to Abiola, who was Yoruba, by President Buhari (a northerner) as something of a Greek gift) to the Yoruba.

⁸⁹ See Outrage over Vanguard editorial chair’s abusive comment <https://punchng.com/outrage-over-vanguard-editorial-chairs-abusive-comment/>

⁹⁰ See Ethnic Slur: Vanguard probes editorial board chair over “sophisticated morons’ comment <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/271744-ethnic-slur-vanguard-probes-editorial-board-chair-over-sophisticated-morons-comment.html>

Nnanna later profusely apologised, ostensibly to keep his job and avoid further criticism from the public.

3.5.5. *ThisDay*

ThisDay was established on January 22, 1995 by Nduka Obaigbena, a man with strong links to the PDP, especially during its years as a ruling party (May 29, 1999 to May 29, 2015). Although Obaigbena was jailed for 10 days under the military rule of the late General Sani Abacha, he is perhaps best-known for his flamboyant lifestyle as a media baron⁹¹ than for his journalism. His newspaper, which owns printing presses in Lagos and Abuja, established the Nigerian media industry trend of newspapers organising awards for prominent businessmen and politicians. Former U.S. president Bill Clinton, former British prime minister Tony Blair, former Australian prime minister John Howard, supermodel Naomi Campbell, and prominent musical artists such as Mary J. Blige, Usher, and Rihanna were among the attendees of the annual *ThisDay* Style Awards at the peak of the newspaper's glory. In 2013, Obaigbena founded the Arise television network in the United Kingdom. According to data obtained from Alexa Reports on April 15, 2019, the time spent daily on *ThisDay*'s website is 4.07.

Although Obaigbena is the president of NPAN, he is in heavy debt and has been known to owe months of unpaid salaries in and outside Nigeria to the staff of his media establishments.⁹² In Nigeria, he reportedly told journalists at his organisation that their identity card was also a meal ticket, this situation cannot be missed as an indoctrination for impropriety. In July 2015, the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) picketed *ThisDay*'s premises in Lagos to protest non-payment of nine months' worth of salaries owed to members of the union who worked at the

⁹¹ See Nsehe, M. (2011) The five most powerful African Media Moguls retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/07/15/the-five-most-powerful-african-media-moguls/#70a5a8ed2eb9>

⁹² See Burell, I. <https://www.iEconomndependent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/arise-tv-owner-of-london-based-tv-news-channel-questioned-in-nigeria-anti-fraud-inquiriy-a6836801.htm>

newspaper. Obaigbena was named as a beneficiary in the 2.1 billion USD arms scandal involving a former national security adviser, Sambo Dasuki. In 2016, he refunded 350 million naira⁹³ (approximately 752,000 GBP) of the 670 million naira (1,440,000 GBP) which he had collected from Dasuki to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

3.5.6 *Premium Times*

Premium Times is published by Dapo Olorunyomi, a veteran journalist and former editor at *Next*. After *Next* halted production, *Premium Times* was established in 2011. In addition to establishing the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism to promote media reporting on corruption, many of the newspaper's journalists have won various local and international prizes for their investigative journalism work in Nigeria over the last five years. *Premium Times* is currently the only news outlet in the country with a website dedicated to investigative stories and special reports on a wide range of social issues, from corruption to election monitoring and HIV/AIDS. In addition to online advertisements, it is supported by international donors such as the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). Similar to *The Guardian*, it is the only newspaper in Nigeria to encourage online readers to support its "journalism of integrity and credibility." This is meant to further entrench the newspaper economically. *Premium Times* has also organised remediation studies programmes for journalism and mass communication students across tertiary institutions in Nigeria for investigative reporting, data journalism, ethics, and new business models. This is another avenue for generating funding. *Premium Times* was chosen for this study because of its emphasis on quality journalism and investigative reporting, its widely acknowledged professionalism, and its emphasis on staff welfare.

⁹³ See \$2.1bn scandal: ThisDay publisher, Obaigbena, returns N350m

3.5.7. Editorial board members of selected newspapers

To establish the underlying factor of the political economy of the Nigerian media, the following reveals the ownership and managerial cum editorial board.

<i>The Punch</i>	Mrs. Angela Olufunmilayo Emuwa (nee Aboderin), chairwoman Mrs. Valerie Omowunmi Tunde-Obe (nee Aboderin), non-executive director Mr. Demola Osinubi, managing director and chief executive officer
<i>The Nation</i>	Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, owner olawale Edun, ⁹⁴ chairman Dele Alake, ⁹⁵ member Victor Ifijeh, managing director
<i>Daily Trust</i>	Kabiru Abdullahi Yusuf, chairman Manir Dan Alli, managing director and chief executive officer Umaru Abdullahi, director Muhammad Aminu Dangana, director Abdullahi Wada Maida, director Rabiu Garba, director Naziru Abubakar, editor-in-chief
<i>Vanguard</i>	Sam Amuka-Pemu, chairman Gbenga Adefuye, managing director and chief executive officer
<i>ThisDay</i>	Nduka Obaigbena, chairman Olusegun Adeniyi, executive director Mrs. Ijeoma Nwogwugwu, executive director Eniola Bello, managing director Kayode Komolafe Deputy, managing director Israel Iwegbu Group, executive director Mustafa Chike-Obi, non-executive director Hassan Ahmed Danbaba, non-executive director Kashim Ibrahim-Imam, non-executive director
<i>Premium Times</i>	Dapo Olorunyomi, chief executive officer and publisher Mojeed Musikilu, editor-in-chief

3.6. Media accountability and its interplay with corruption

In December 2015, *The Punch* published an article that asserted that “a weakened press that accepts undue government patronage under whatever guise cannot

⁹⁴ Edun served as finance commissioner during Tinubu’s tenure as governor of Lagos State between 1999 and 2007.

⁹⁵ Alake served as information commissioner when Tinubu was governor of Lagos State between 1999 and 2007. Alake is also on the board of Television Continental (TVC), a 24-hour television news channel owned by Tinubu and based in Lagos.

effectively play its role as society's watchdog."⁹⁶ It referred to the dilemma faced by its competitors, which were named as beneficiaries of diverted security funds in one of the largest and earliest cases of corruption investigated by the Buhari government. More importantly, the newspaper captured the lack of accountability in the media in Nigeria.

Sambo Dasuki, a former national security adviser to ex-president Goodluck Jonathan, was at the centre of the corruption case. In a bid to secure favourable framings of the government under which he served, he was reported to have gone to great lengths to dispense security funds to buy arms and ammunition for the military during an election year, as political patronage to select groups, including the media. Among the latter were members of NPAN. They reportedly accepted large sums of money under the pretext of receiving compensation for newspaper copies that were hitherto confiscated by the Nigerian military in June 2014. This came to light after the new government ordered a probe of funds approved for the purchase of weapons to fight Boko Haram in 2015.

As the issue unfolded, the question of whether to refund the money generated acrimony among newspaper proprietors, who received the funds; some newspapers falsely denied receiving the money. For instance, NPAN leadership debunked the *Guardian's* claim that it did not request compensation for the losses that it incurred after the military cracked down on newspapers. A fact check conducted by the relatively new online news outlet, *Premium Times*, established that *The Guardian* actually did file claims for compensation.⁹⁷ While some newspapers, including

⁹⁶ See "NPAN and arms scandal" Punch Editorial, December 18, 2015, retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20151218004726/http://www.punchng.com/npan-and-arms-scandal/>

⁹⁷ See Adebayo, T. (2015) Dasukigate: Guardian Newspapers lied, it was part of NPAN decision to collect N120 million-Obaigbena. Retrieved from

Daily Trust, *Blueprint*, *Leadership*, *The Nation*, and *The Sun* refunded the money to redress their tattered image, other outlets did not. *The Punch*, which did not file a claim for compensation, withdrew its membership from NPAN to distance itself from the scandal.

The case of *The Guardian* was particularly instructive because it had previously earned a reputation for integrity. Its credibility mainly derived from the high calibre of its journalists. Founded in 1983 by the late Alex Ibru, a prominent businessman, *The Guardian* was well-known for pioneering the setup of an editorial board made up of senior journalists, professors, retired generals, former ambassadors, retired senior civil servants, former governors, and captains of industry. This broad management structure was intended to provide a balanced view of any topics that the newspaper wrote about. When members of the board reached a consensus, an editorial was written; if one of the members felt strongly about an issue over which there was consensus, they were allowed to present their dissenting views on the op-ed page.

Thus, over the last two decades, *The Guardian*, which was seen as “elitist,” had been esteemed as the flagship of the Nigerian press. Thus, the newspaper’s mention as part of the culprits in the corruption scandal was a slur on its integrity. Indeed, the involvement of *The Guardian* and other daily newspapers in the scandal indicates that the Nigerian media itself an actor marred by deception and corruption. This is a major reason why media trust and credibility have been weakened, as outlets have pandered to the whims of politicians (see also Mabweazara, 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). It also lends credence to Pellegata and Splendore’s (2017) argument that journalists cannot be said to be immune from the negative effects of corruption, given their pivotal role in connecting politics and public opinion.

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/195133-dasukigate-guardian-newspapers-lied-it-was-part-of-npan-decision-to-collect-n120-million-obaigbena.html>

Adrian Monck (2008) remarked on the current discussion of the political economy of the Nigerian media landscape:

Instead of asking whether the media can be trusted, we need to teach people how to live in a world where trust is something that is withheld. People need to be sceptical as a matter of course. Then they won't be so disappointed. Scepticism is the faculty to which we should be appealing, but instead the media is tying itself in knots over credibility and trust. (p.3)

In the next chapter, the methodology employed in this thesis is described.

CHAPTER 4

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the appropriateness of the research design and methods employed to assess the mediative role of the mainstream print media in the war on corruption in Nigeria. It examines how journalism professionals frame news discourse on corruption in an anticorruption war. This is a two-part study. The first part focuses on an analysis of news reports of corruption to identify news frames in a representative sample of Nigerian newspapers. The second part consists of interviews with journalism professionals to reflect on their practice, fill gaps in the content analysis of the newspapers, and examine the challenges that they face in reporting corruption news. The news frames were identified through the content analysis, while themes were identified through the interviews. As Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, and Newbold (1998) observed, combining research methods not only produces better research but also enables a deeper understanding of the study topic (p.1). The thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the patterns of news coverage of corruption in the Nigerian press under the Buhari administration?
2. What challenges do Nigerian journalists face in reporting corruption stories under the Buhari administration?
3. How has ownership of the media impacted the coverage of corruption and the Buhari administration's anticorruption war?

4.2. Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology concerns the orientation or mindset of the researcher in engaging with the focus of investigation. The principles implicit in the current research are reflective of the interpretivist paradigm, in which collected data are assigned meaning by the researcher. Qualitative research lies at the core of the interpretivist paradigm (Willig, 2017, p.274). The emergence of the interpretive paradigm, according to Dean (2018), was due to the dissonance between positivist scholars who favoured quantitative approaches and postpositivist or constructivist scholars who sought a “more naturalistic yet equally valid scientific inquiry in empirical social sciences” (Dean, 2018, p.3). Corroborating the work of Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2014), Dean explained,

The *Interpretive Turn* was coined to demark research practices that turn away from de-humanised, objective research towards a re-humanised, contextual, and reflexive approach, which centralises human meaning making and knowledge claims. (2018, p.3)

Thus, while positivism is linked to concepts such as objectivity through a dependency on measurable quantitative data (Schroeder, Drotner, Kline& Murray, 2003, p.176) in the explanation of social phenomena, interpretivism assumes that individuals can make logical decisions, which is often reflected in language and emotions. The interpretivist paradigm stems from the realities of people’s lived experiences and theory, which “becomes more fully articulated in the process of thinking back and forth between and across them” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p.40).

The Buhari administration’s crusade against corruption is a marked feature of the reality of contemporary politics in Nigeria. It is a major pivot point which brought Buhari and his political party, the APC, into office. Buhari defeated his closest rival, former president Goodluck Jonathan, by 2,571,759 votes in the 2015 presidential elections. The victory was seen as a deepening of the democratic process in Nigeria. In addition to corruption, the government

promised to address insecurity in Nigeria, particularly the threat posed by the Boko Haram terrorist group, and revamp the national economy. All these commitments were rooted in the realities of citizens and aimed to foster nation building, social justice, and progress.

Media institutions are central to issues of governance in society (Cook, 2005; Couldry 2019) because of their role in the dissemination and interpretation of information for members of the public. The key purpose of journalism, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014), is “to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing.” Two main concepts resonate within this definition of journalism: information and democracy. The current thesis is more concerned with the former. In Nigeria, citizens receive information about the anticorruption crusade, security issues, and the uncertainty of the economy through the news.

However, news conveys emotions which enable the public to appraise situations in society. According to Carey, most criticisms associated with journalism stem from the use of “language.” He indicated that “journalism sizes up situations, names their elements and names them in a way that contains an attitude toward them” (Carey 1974, p.245). Indeed, some scholars have argued that emotion can breed cynicism among citizens and consequently affect how they participate in the democratic process (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Thus, criticisms of tabloidisation are justified, and it is viewed as a distasteful form of journalism. Despite such criticisms, it is also possible for emotion to serve the public good (Ornebring & Jonsson, 2004, p.292).

Scholars in the social sciences and humanities have continually underscored the significance and power of language as a tool for social construction. In terms of communication, Couldry and Hepp (2017) argued, “As language is so important for social construction, our ‘communicative doing’ is as far-reaching as our ‘physical doing.’” Thus, adhering to the lofty ideals of objectivity notwithstanding, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen highlighted that the output of

media practitioners is suffused with emotion, which is inherently reflected in “journalistic socialisation processes and everyday work” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013, p.130; see also Manoff & Schudson, 1987, p.3). In addition, since journalism is concerned with enhancing the quality of democratic citizenship and governance, it is especially relevant to consider what journalism and its practitioners can contribute in their dissemination and interpretation of information related to accountability in society. The thesis aims to do this by exploring the role of the mainstream print media in the anticorruption war in Nigeria.

4.3 Research Methods

This research heavily relies on the qualitative approach, although it adopted the triangulation method, which is also referred to as mixed methods research (MMR). The triangulation method allows the researcher to use multiple approaches or perspectives to find answers to research problems. Leavy (2017) noted that this approach enables the researcher to comprehensively understand the nature of a research problem because it involves the synergistic collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single project, “with the quantitative phase influencing the qualitative phase, or vice-versa” (p.9). The author further explained that this approach is most suitable when the purpose “is to describe, explain, or evaluate”, and are valuable for considering complex issues (p.164). The first research question in this study was addressed through a qualitative content analysis of newspaper texts, while the second and third research questions were answered using semi-structured interviews.

4.3.1. Content analysis and news framing

Researchers in the interpretivist paradigm often borrow constructs from positivism. One of these is content analysis, which originated from analysis of the propagandistic effects of the hypodermic needle theory. Regarding knowledge, quantitative content analysis has been employed as a critical tool by communication scholars to investigate media content in

newspapers, books, websites, Facebook, Twitter, press releases, laws, advertisements, song lyrics, images, diaries, government policy, parliamentary speeches, and transcripts of news reports (Corrigall Brown, 2013). Moreover, quantitative content analysis has been applied in studies on the impact of emerging technologies such as television and the internet and persuasive messages in electoral campaigns.

Kerlinger (2000; cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2011, p.156) defined content analysis as a “method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables.” Macnamara (2011) stipulated that media content analysis was initially introduced by Harold Lasswell as a systematic method for studying propaganda in mass media. Thus, it can be deduced that content analysis is anchored on a three-prong approach: systematic, objective, and quantitative. Berelson (1952; cited in Macnamara, 2011, p.3), highlighted five purposes of content analysis: describing the substantive characteristics of the message content, describing the form characteristics of the message content, making inferences to producers of content, making inferences to audiences of content, and predicting the effects of content on audiences. Thus, content analysis can be said to unveil hidden meanings in written, oral, or published communicative events and their interpretation. Nevertheless, some scholars have proposed a more precise definition of quantitative content analysis, describing it as

the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption. (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2014, p.19)

Qualitative content analysis has, however, emerged in response to the thriving research on media effects and the rigidity associated with quantitative content analysis (Schreier, 2013, p. 196). A notable feature of qualitative content analysis approach is its flexibility (Schreier,

2013). Indeed, Siegfried Kracauer (1952, p.631) first noted the limitations inherent in quantitative content analysis; he indicated that an undue emphasis on quantification “tends to lessen the accuracy of analysis.” Thus, he suggested a complementary outlook that mixes both approaches:

it should be emphasized that the terms “qualitative analysis” and “quantitative analysis” do not refer to radically different approaches. Quantitative analysis includes qualitative aspects, for it both originates and culminates in qualitative considerations. On the other hand, qualitative analysis proper often requires quantification in the interest of exhaustive treatment. (p.637)

The author of this thesis was mindful of the above when examining patterns of corruption news coverage in the daily newspapers chosen for the research. For the content analysis, the important role of comparative case studies in unearthing media frames was also acknowledged.

As Entman (1991) noted, unless media narratives are

compared, frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably, because many of the framing devices can appear as “natural” unremarkable choices of words or images. Comparison reveals that such choices are not inevitable or unproblematic but rather are central to the way the news frame helps establish the literally “common sense” (i.e., widespread) interpretation of events. (p.6)

Thus, to ensure the comparability of media narratives, five mainstream print newspapers and one online newspaper from Nigeria were selected for this study; they serve as a representative sample of the country’s mediasphere. The coding for the content analysis was conducted by the researcher, who was assisted in the process by two graduate students from the Department of Mass Communication of the University of Ilorin in Nigeria. Grimmer and Stewart (2013, p. 268) highlighted a significant drawback associated with computer-aided coding, indicating that automated methods were “no substitute for careful thought and close reading” due to the complexities of language and the need for “extensive and problem-specific validation.”

4.3.1.1. Selected corruption cases

Guided by the principle of separation of powers in a democracy, three key corruption cases were selected for this research. These distinct cases involved public figures, which attracted considerable media attention. They are useful not only because they are practical examples of how the media frames corruption but also because they provide considerable information about the anticorruption war. They are also relevant for generating ideas for further research and enabled the researcher to engage with a wide spectrum of evidence and why. The three cases are as follows:

1. Content analysis of corruption news coverage in the executive branch

This case concerns a fraudulent arms procurement deal worth 2.1 billion dollars. It involved Dasuki, a former national security adviser to ex-president Jonathan, Buhari's immediate predecessor. The National Assembly approved the purchase of arms to use against Boko Haram in the northeastern part of Nigeria. However, the sums were allegedly diverted to fund Jonathan's 2015 reelection campaign.

2. Content analysis of corruption news coverage in the judiciary branch

The case under examination is that of Walter Onnoghen, a former chief justice of Nigeria. He was accused of falsely declaring assets and was unable to legitimately account for the fund in hard currencies found in his account. He was suspended from office, and the president approved the National Judicial Council's (NJC) recommendation to retire Onnoghen with full benefits.

3. Content analysis of corruption news coverage in the legislature

The case examines the practice of "budget padding" by the National Assembly during the passage of Nigeria's national budget in 2016. The budgetary or appropriation process is often a major source of conflict between the executive and legislative branches of government.

4.3.1.2. Study area for the content analysis of news reports on corruption

In this thesis, the study area for the content analysis of news reports was the aforementioned corruption-related issues covered in the six publications chosen for the study:

1. *The Punch*
2. *The Nation*
3. *Daily Trust*
4. *Vanguard*
5. *ThisDay*
6. *Premium Times*

The justification for selecting these news outlets was established in Chapter Three, which described the political economy of the Nigerian media landscape. They were chosen based on their influence, quality, and geographical reach and cover a wide range of political perspectives. The content of these newspapers are also reviewed daily on television and radio broadcast stations across the country.

4.3.1.3. Newspaper reach and circulation

A notable similarity between the five print newspapers, which represent the mainstream press, is the establishment of printing presses in strategic locations in Nigeria. *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *ThisDay* all have printing presses in Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja. *Vanguard* has printing presses in Lagos, Asaba (South South), and Abuja. *Daily Trust* has four printing presses in Lagos, Abuja, Kano, and Maiduguri.

Printing presses were established in different geopolitical zones to cater to ethnicity or ownership, capture greater market share, and increase circulation, although the circulation figures of these daily newspapers remain a secret. For example, establishing printing presses in Lagos caters to the needs of audiences in Lagos and states in the southwestern part of the

country. However, for a newspaper like *Daily Trust*, whose primary audience is in the northern part of Nigeria, a printing press was established in Lagos to cover the market for the entire south, which comprises states in the South West, South, and South East.

In *Vanguard's* case, printing presses in Port Harcourt and Asaba⁹⁸ are expected to address the needs of audiences in the South and South East. Those established in Abuja were intended to cater to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and states in North Central, the North East, and the North West. Only *Daily Trust* has a printing press in Kano and Maiduguri, as it primarily appeals to a northern audience.

All of these media organisations are respected daily newspapers with a wide readership both online and offline. The next section contains an overview of their strategic statements, production, main advertisers, and competitive strengths, as described by media managers.

⁹⁸ Port Harcourt and Asaba are located in the southernmost part of Nigeria. This area is also known as the Niger Delta region, where Nigeria's main resource, crude oil, is extracted.

Table 1: Overview of newspapers

Newspapers	Strategy statements and code of ethics	Production and circulation	Competitive strengths (according to media managers)	Main advertisers
<i>The Punch</i>	“We are guided by the principles of factual, balanced, and fair reporting and commentaries. We believe that these principles and ethical conduct are the basis of public trust and confidence”	Has printing presses in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt Circulation numbers have not been made public.	Ranked most popular among mainstream newspaper websites by Alexa.com, as of September 9, 2019; has built trust and confidence among readers over time; reports stories in a factual and unbiased manner and represents all sides; serves the people truthfully; hails and knocks the government as appropriate; gives everyone the right to know the truth because it is sacred; focus on developmental journalism; and the prioritisation of the welfare of workers (e.g., regular payments of salaries and other remunerations)	Government (federal, state, and local) and government agencies (ministries, departments, and agencies), corporate organisations, and individuals
<i>The Nation</i>	“A quality national newspaper with credible and dependable information. Not beholden to any interest group. Loyalty is to the nation”	Has printing presses in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt	Exclusive stories that are irresistible, strong circulation network, timely appearance of newspaper on newsstands, and reputable columnists	Government (federal, state, and local) and government agencies (ministries, departments, and agencies), corporate organisations, and individuals
<i>Daily Trust</i>	A paper you can trust	Has printing presses in Lagos, Abuja, Port	A general interest newspaper with strong appeal to readers in the northern part of Nigeria, distributes copies to all parts of the country, has a strong network of correspondents in all states, trustworthiness, and adherence to high standards of objectivity	Government (federal, state, and local), private and public sector

		Harcourt and Maiduguri		organisations (including government agencies)
		Circulation numbers have not been made public.		
<i>ThisDay</i>	“The newspaper is a public trust dedicated to the pursuit of truth and reason”	Has printing presses in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt	A newspaper of choice among the elite, masters of innovation in the industry with several firsts in the pioneering of colour printing in Nigeria, simultaneous printing of newspapers from three regions to cover the entire country (thereby abrogating the long-standing practice of printing different editions for each region), effective coverage of politics and the economy, and highly regarded columnists	Corporate organisations, particularly financial institutions and government ministries
		Claims a daily circulation of around 100,000 (50,000 in the South West; 40,000 in the north; and 10,000 in the South East and South South)		
<i>Vanguard</i>	“To impact positively on our readers/clients	Has printing presses in	Strong online presence, particular appeal to readers in the South and South East	Corporate organisations; government ministries,

	and society by providing high quality, reliable and affordable media products for promoting knowledge, political stability and economic prosperity”	Lagos, Abuja, and Asaba Claims a daily circulation of around 130,000		departments and agencies; and individuals
<i>Premium Times</i>	To create an accountability media by showing “best practices” that enable the media to hold the powerful to account, thereby ensuring the dignity and liberty of Nigerian citizens and promoting media freedom, which is fundamental to a sustainable democracy	Mainly appeals to youthful demographic (ages 18–45)	Not-for profit newsroom, establishment of the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism, practices a brand of journalism that has engendered public trust, known for reliability and investigative reporting, all of which have encouraged the growth of the newspaper’s following of loyal and trustworthy readers	Overall, 30% of revenue generated from advertisements by corporate organisations and individuals; receives funding from external donors such as the McArthur Foundation, the Open Society Institute, etc.

4.3.1.4. Sampling timeframe

In this study, the sampling timeframe for the content analysis of corruption-related news items was from May 29, 2015, when Buhari assumed office, to May 28, 2019, when he completed his first term as president. In total, the period covered spans four years.

4.3.1.5. Content analysis sampling procedure

News articles on each of the selected corruption cases were obtained from the archives of the six news outlets chosen for this thesis. This process was conducted by the researcher, with support from two graduate students from the University of Ilorin, who also participated in data coding. During the planning stages of the content analysis, they were trained by the researcher to not only look out for the manifest features of the news articles but also to evaluate these in relation to the stories' subtler aspects. According to Van Gorp (2005, p.486), attention should be paid "to the manifest and latent structure of a news story" when analysing frames in media content. This "sufficiently guarantees the reliability and the validity of the findings." The content analysis was conducted through manual coding, which involved a close reading of the articles. Codes were created, then thematically organised to ensure consistency within categories. Subsequently, frames were inductively generated by analysing the themes. The following table shows the number of articles compiled for each corruption case.

Table 2: Media Articles Compiled for the Three Corruption Cases

News outlets	Executive (arms deal)	Judiciary (false assets)	Legislature (budget padding)
<i>The Punch</i>	224	225	156
<i>The Nation</i>	201	157	139
<i>Daily Trust</i>	162	71	61
<i>Vanguard</i>	205	83	124

<i>ThisDay</i>	176	196	83
<i>Premium Times</i>	156	98	108
Total	1,124	830	671

The table shows that news reports on corruption in the executive branch of the government were more common than those on corruption in other branches of government. This implies that corruption in the executive branch received greater attention from news outlets. This finding aligns with Dalen’s (2012) assertion that the news media focuses more on social actors in the executive branch of the government than those in the legislative branch.

The first research question concerned patterns in corruption news coverage. In this thesis, these were generally explained in light of measures relating to perceptions of corruption news, news sources, news values, and framing categories. The justification for this was established in the preceding chapters. While the case of the arms deal fraud involving Dasuki was used to establish the patterns of portrayal and those of news sources. The case involving Onnoghen was used to highlight patterns related to news values in the reporting of corruption-related stories.

After completing the content analysis, it becomes obvious to annex to it interviews to mop up matters that remain unclear. It is also intended to probe further areas that are not attainable from the journalists’ contribution to the media coverage of the war against corruption. The lopsided nature of some of the news outlets for or against the government endeavours precipitates a problem that needed to be unravelled. Thus, all preliminaries of demographic, age, qualification, experience are put in the interviews to satisfy the rituals, whereas, what the current researcher set out to achieve is to probe further what accounts for the divergence in the narratives on the anticorruption crusade. The divisive elements of ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation were employed by elites to divide the people, who ordinarily live together

in harmony before the introduction of factors to divide them. In light of this, the researcher considered issues related to ethnoreligious or geopolitical affiliation during the interviews. This was necessary because Nigeria is a pluralist society, and journalists would not own up to canvassing for any of the divisive elements or admit sympathy for ethnic nationalism. However, their responses revealed their latent part. The main goal was to understand the factors that affect news production in anticorruption coverage.

4.3.2. Use of interviews and news framing

Interviews have been described as “the most powerful research technique” (Merriam, 2007, cited in Roulston, 2014, p.297). Given that they are a qualitative research method, Jensen (2002, p.32-33) underscored the importance of language, noting that both the “interviewer and respondent(s) negotiate an understanding of the subject matter in question, which subsequently, in the form of tapes and transcripts, becomes the object of linguistic analysis and textual interpretation.” Interviews can be structured or unstructured. In a structured interview, the researcher prepares standardised questions, which they ask the respondent in a strictly predetermined order. While this seem more manageable to analyse for the researcher, it could limit the amount of information provided by respondents. On the other hand, an unstructured interview may prove unwieldy due to the amount of information generated; therefore, the results could be difficult for the researcher to analyse.

Thus, in this study, the semi-structured interviews were used to examine how Nigerian journalists contextualised the war on corruption, the challenges that they face in reporting on corruption, how media ownership may impact coverage. Semi-structured interviews were favoured for this research because of their “relatively natural flow of talk, freedom for the respondent to explore unpredicted avenues of thought, and flexibility of the interviewer in selecting aspects of the discourse to follow up” (Coolican, 2017, p.175). These benefits are

central to effective framing research because they enable the researcher to shed light on the respondents' hidden feelings, attitudes, and beliefs, which they may not be immediately aware of. In addition, interviews can provide detailed information about the topic at hand.

4.3.2.1. Data collection and research setting

Researchers have underscored the need to pay attention to details and ensure “demonstration of rigour” in the writing-up of qualitative research. As Adrian Holliday (2007, p.53) noted, qualitative researchers “can easily underestimate the need for detail in their description of procedure.” This detail includes “the degree of engagement with the setting” (Holliday, 2007, p.53). Thus, before the author of this thesis left the United Kingdom for her field trip in Nigeria, she contacted some editors and former colleagues at *The Guardian* newspaper in Lagos, where she had previously worked before joining academia.

These editors and former colleagues helped the researcher establish contact with some of the interviewees. Some were very willing to participate in the research. As a result, the researcher was able to reach interview subjects and editors at the six news organisations chosen for this study to discuss their coverage of corruption news stories and the challenges that they faced in the reporting of these stories. To address ethical concern, the researcher was issued a letter of introduction from the University of Kent to present to individuals and agencies with relevant information for the research.

Although many who participants commended the research topic and described it as interesting, timely, and deserving of scholarly interest, not all of those contacted were willing to participate. Some told the researcher that they were not keen to be recorded, while others were reluctant to talk due to lack of faith in the administration and other unspecified reasons. One of these contacts was Mr. Olusegun Adeniyi, the chairman of *ThisDay*'s editorial board; he said that the research area was interesting but declined to formally participate. If this interviewee was

scared of anything, it will be due to the fear of a backlash from his employer who may be concerned of not losing patronage through advertisements. Another challenge encountered by the researcher during the data collection process was the difficulty of setting up face-to-face interviews with some participants who agreed to cooperate, as they were often in the field during the day and returned to the newsroom in the evening to work late. Thus, the researcher adopted a multi-method approach to collecting data. The data were processed. This data were obtained through face-to-face interactions⁹⁹ with participants, email, and telephone. Follow-ups with interviewees were conducted via telephone and email; the results were documented, then transcribed by the researcher.

4.3.2.2. Participants

There were three groups of interview participants for this thesis. They consisted of journalists, political spokespersons, and academics. The most significant group for this research were journalism professionals. The researcher sought to understand, in participants' own words, how they framed stories related to corruption, beginning with their interpretation of the "war on corruption" under the Buhari government.

The researcher wanted to know how their perceptions of the war on corruption shaped their production of news about corruption. This served the critical function of bringing into focus the challenges that they may face in the production and coverage of news about corruption under a government that champions anticorruption. The latter is especially significant because it underlines the factors that influence the frame-building process in coverage of corruption and the fight against it. It also contributes to the illumination of influences on media routines concerning the subject.

⁹⁹ The researcher undertook fieldwork in Nigeria between July and October 2019. She kept in touch with participants and continued to gather and update data via electronic means upon return to the United Kingdom.

The researcher interviewed journalists whose bylines frequently appeared in the dataset of corruption news stories used in the content analysis for the case studies examined in this thesis. The researcher recognises that these individuals are professionals who work at organisations which require them to conform to institutional processes and practices in the discharge of their duties. Therefore, the researcher also sought out and interviewed staff members with managerial oversight at these news establishments. They consisted of editors who work directly with the interviewed journalists and media managers. It is important to note that, at some outlets, senior journalists who double as editors also cover corruption-related stories. They were also interviewed for this research. Often, journalists at newspapers rise through the ranks to become editors; therefore, journalists and editors are often referred to as a single bloc within this research.

4.3.2.2.1. Interview participants from the industry

While participants differed in terms of status, influence, and the conditions under which they perform their respective tasks, they all spoke on record for this research. Although anonymity was widely held as an important consideration for the protection of participants and the integrity of the research process, the fact that journalists spoke on record for the current study does not appear to have undermined the quality of the information that they shared with the researcher. As producers of texts in the discourse on the war against corruption, they were motivated by their struggles against successive military dictatorships in Nigeria, which centred on mobilising citizens to action. For example, one participant played a major role in guerrilla journalism, a defiant form of newspaper publishing that seeks to tackle state brutality under military rule (see Ibelema, 2003).

During these trying times, news organisations such as *The Punch* were shut down by the military government. The interviewed media practitioners gave the impression that they were keen to speak on record; they did not appear to be overly concerned about their comments

having adverse effects on their work. In a previous study, a researcher who conducted a study in Bulgaria recognised the problems that participants could face without anonymisation of the data: “identifying a journalist who was very critical of their media owner or their editor-in-chief could have an adverse effect on their careers” (Price, 2015, p.193). In this case, participants claimed that they did not fear their editor-in-chief or the newspaper owner because they were criticising the government’s approach to fighting a common enemy in Nigeria: corruption. However, the validity of this claim is limited by the political and ethnoreligious affiliations of newspaper owners. By asserting their boldness to speak on record, participants argued that the situation during the period under examination in this research was not as dire as in the dark days of the military oppression of the media (Ibelema, 2003).

Simply put, participants did not show any apprehension about being identified because they considered themselves professionals who had produced reports on corruption cases under their real names in the media outlets analysed in this research. Indeed, this is what led the researcher to contact them, as their views would complement the content analyses (see Chapters Five, Six, and Seven) and the interviews with news producers (see Chapter Nine). Researchers who study anonymity have established that journalists are accustomed to speaking on record. For instance, Isabel Awad (2006) drew attention to an ethical challenge common to both anthropology and journalism with regard to research with human participants, which requires informed consent prior to research, its potential effects, and participants’ right to anonymity. She noted that, while anthropologists have responded to this challenge in a critical manner, journalists have taken a different approach; they often argue that it is “the people’s right to know,” which underscores the “potential incompatibilities between news making and a protective treatment of sources” (2006, p.923).

For journalism and journalists, ensuring the confidentiality of sources is partly linked to evaluative standards of credibility. As Awad indicated, “confidentiality is not an asset, but a costly compromise in the trade-off for information . . . In journalism, real names are real people and hiding those names is a cause for suspicion” (2006, p.923). In the current research, participants were willing to speak on the record, as those who do not fear writing under their own name in newspapers for a Nigerian public readership are hardly afraid to be identified in an academic study. Indeed, the participants’ responses show that they did not simply toe a professional line but rather reflected on their journalistic practices. For example, one participant informed the researcher that *“nobody stops you from writing your story or submitting your report but where the challenge lies is when you submit it.”*¹⁰⁰ Thus, the editorial board decides whether to use, moderate, or even discard a story. This decision is not borne out of fear of reprisal. Conversely, journalists were, when necessary, critical of the government, politicians, or the newspapers they worked for. This suggests that speaking on record was important to them, and little would have been gained from being anonymously interviewed. Agbese (2006) and Babasola (2017) also conducted studies in which journalist participants spoke on record in the context of journalism scholarship. In most social science research, it is the norm not to speak on record, but it is less unusual to speak on record in the context of journalism scholarship as pointed out here.

It is also important to note that journalists in Nigeria have seen themselves from the beginning as the voice of the voiceless and people imbued with power of the pen to withstand the power of the bullet (Olukotun, 2004; AB, Nigeria, 1946). It was through journalists’ activities that colonial rule was brought to an end. It was also through journalism that military rule either thrived (Seng and Hunt, 1986) or was forced out of power (Ibelema, 2003). It was through the

¹⁰⁰ See journalist interviews on p. 281.

activities of journalists that democracy was restored 22 years ago. It was largely thanks to their efforts through them that the change to a democratic government occurred, which had been hitherto unknown in the political history of Nigeria. Thus, when they sound a note of caution, it will be in reference to litigation that may happen should a report attract a libel suit. The concerns expressed by journalism scholars over the perceived hazards of the job are similar to a concern that a caring parent would show towards a child going to the battlefield.

Nevertheless, the decision to anonymise journalist participants in this thesis was motivated by the desire to conform to ethical norms in contemporary scholarship. Despite the participants' readiness to speak on record, keeping the interviews anonymous conforms to accepted social science practices and the University of Kent's ethics code of practice. In addition, given that the thesis focuses on the framing of corruption stories and the newspapers' underlying affiliations with different geographic, political, and ethnoreligious considerations, the researcher believed that the participants would have been more comfortable critically reflecting on their journalistic practices if they could do so anonymously.

The researcher employed two broad categories to distinguish between those entrusted with managerial oversight, who were designated with the label "managerial/editorial board," and participants who directly report and edit corruption stories (i.e., "journalists"). However, the roles of participants in the two categories overlapped. Members of the managerial/editorial board influenced what was published at the media outlet, while journalists has a significant impact on the accessing and framing of corruption news. The interviews were conducted in English, and the obtained data were transcribed and analysed.

Table 3: In-depth interview participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Organisation	Role	Experience (in years)
Esther	62	Female	<i>The Punch</i>	Managerial/editorial board member	27
Deji	57	Male	<i>The Punch</i>	Managerial/editorial board member	30
Ayo	36	Male	<i>The Punch</i>	Journalist	11
George	49	Male	<i>The Punch</i>	Journalist	21
Uche	51	Male	<i>The Punch</i>	Journalist	15
Paul	59	Male	<i>The Nation</i>	Managerial/editorial board member	35
Chief	56	Male	<i>The Nation</i>	Managerial/editorial board member, journalist	33
Samson	41	Male	<i>The Nation</i>	Journalist	11
Lateef	60	Male	<i>The Nation</i>	Journalist	28
Musa	58	Male	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Managerial/editorial board member	21
Bello	42	Male	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Managerial/editorial board member	13
Francis	46	Male	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Journalist	15
Lere	40	Male	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Journalist	16
Joe	51	Male	<i>ThisDay</i>	Managerial/editorial board member	26
Adesina	53	Male	<i>ThisDay</i>	Journalist	28
Mike	44	Male	<i>ThisDay</i>	Journalist	15
Usman	39	Male	<i>ThisDay</i>	Journalist	11
David	53	Male	<i>Vanguard</i>	Managerial/editorial board member, journalist	27
Joshua	55	Male	<i>Vanguard</i>	Journalist	26
Ifeanyi	47	Male	<i>Vanguard</i>	Journalist	12
Ismail	30	Male	<i>Vanguard</i>	Journalist	8
Baba	64	Male	<i>Premium Times</i>	Managerial/editorial board member	Over 35
Niyi	50	Male	<i>Premium Times</i>	Journalist	28
Azeez	37	Male	<i>Premium Times</i>	Journalist	14
Chioma	28	female	<i>Premium Times</i>	Journalist	5

4.3.2.2.2. Interview participants with spokespersons of the political leadership

In addition to the media, other key players who exert tremendous influence in a political system are political leaders. In Nigeria, these political actors conceived of the anticorruption war, exert

a preeminent impact and opinions about it, and actively seek to influence the thinking of the populace. These actions are intended to encourage positive perceptions of the government among the people and persuade them that the government's anticorruption efforts are in their best interests and thus deserve their support. To position this interplay between journalists and the political arena within the research, the researcher interviewed two key spokespersons for the Buhari government:

1. Mallam Garba Shehu, senior special assistant to the president on media and publicity
2. Tolu Ogunlesi, special assistant to the president on digital/new media and the head of digital communications for the Buhari administration

Both Shehu and Ogunlesi had established careers as professional journalists before serving in the Buhari government. While Shehu was previously the president of the Nigerian Guild of Editors, Ogunlesi received the CNN Multichoice African Journalism Award in 2009 and in 2013.

4.3.2.2.3. Interview participants from academia

The last category of interview participants in this research consists of established journalism experts within Nigerian academia. They represent eight universities across the country and were contacted to assess the performance of Nigerian journalists in the production and coverage of corruption-related news under a government that promotes anticorruption. The following academic experts were interviewed:

1. Professor Ralph Akinfeleye is a renowned scholar of journalism and communication in Nigeria. He is among the longest-serving academics in the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Lagos. He represents Africa at the World Journalism Education Council.

2. Professor Lai Oso is a former dean of the School of Communication at Lagos State University in Ojo, Lagos State. He is also the national president of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN). Before venturing into academia, he worked as a reporter at the News Agency of Nigeria.
3. Professor Suleiman Salau works at the Department of Mass Communication at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. He is one of the oldest professors of mass communication in Nigeria and has over 40 years of experience in the field of journalism and communication.
4. Professor Umaru Pate was a staff of the University of Maiduguri in Maiduguri. He later joined Bayero University in Kano. He is the first dean of the Faculty of Media, Communication and Film Studies in this University.
5. Professor Nnamdi T. Ekeanyanwu is the national president of the African Council on Communication Education's (ACCE) Nigerian chapter. He works at the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Uyo in Uyo.
6. Professor Bayo Oloyede works at the Department of Mass Communication at Redeemers University. He has served in different capacities within the university system, including as head of department. He was also appointed a consultant on media and information literacy by the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).
7. Professor Victor Ayedun Aluma is a teacher and researcher on media at the University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria.
8. Professor Innocent Okoye is a teacher and researcher of media at one of the federal government new generation universities in Ekiti State, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti.

In total, there were 35 participants in this research. Twenty-five interviewees were drawn from the media industry, two represented the political class, and eight worked in academia. The

participants spanned the geopolitical and ethnoreligious divide in Nigeria to ensure a balance in our survey and for a wide catchment area.

4.4. Ethical Concerns

To conduct the interviews, the researcher adhered to ethical standards established by the University of Kent's Code of Ethical Practice for Research by ensuring that all research activities involved were conducted with the utmost integrity. On the issue of naming sources, it should be noted that journalists, academics, and government spokespersons were prepared to be interviewed on record. While this may mean that they were more guarded in their responses, the current researcher felt that it was better to include "guarded" interviews than none at all. Most importantly, their responses indicated that they were not particularly guarded. For instance, the journalist participants acknowledged the ways in which their news coverage was edited.

4.5. Summary

This chapter detailed how the study was conducted and justified the methods employed in the research. The thesis largely followed the interpretivist paradigm and adopted a mixed-methods research design that involved the use of qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. The researcher employed content analysis to investigate media coverage of specific corruption cases related to the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches of government to inductively identify frames. The timeframe for the analysis of corruption-related news stories was May 29, 2015 to May 28, 2019. Lastly, the researcher interviewed journalists who directly covered corruption-related stories and staff members in managerial positions at the relevant news establishments to better understand the framing of corruption. The interviews covered how industry professionals contextualised news about corruption, the challenges that they face in the process, and the impact of media owners in this context. Their views contrasted with

information provided from spokespersons for the government. Of significance also were responses from leading journalism scholars in Nigeria. At all stages of the study, the researcher attempted to comply with the University of Kent's ethical standards.

CHAPTER 5

5.0 Case Study 1: The Arms Deal

5.1 Background

The arms deal case—or “Dasukigate,” as it is popularly referred to in the Nigerian media—is one of the earliest cases of corruption investigated under the Buhari government. It involved Sambo Dasuki, a retired colonel, prince of the Sokoto caliphate, and the scion of the former sultan of Sokoto, the late Ibrahim Dasuki. The younger Dasuki served as a national security adviser (NSA) to ex-president Goodluck Jonathan, who conceded defeat in the 2015 presidential elections that brought Buhari to power. After a debrief with the new president, Dasuki and other security chiefs appointed by Jonathan (e.g., the heads of the army, navy, and air force and the chief of defence) were relieved of their appointments, and their replacements¹⁰¹ were announced in the media two hours later.

The next day, officials from the Department of the State Security Service (DSS) simultaneously searched the residences of Sambo Dasuki in Abuja, which was cordoned off, and his father, Ibrahim Dasuki, in Sokoto State. At the end of a prolonged siege which lasted nearly 24 hours, the DSS informed Nigerians through the media that Dasuki had been planning to commit treasonable felony against the country and that his passport and other documents had been seized. The DSS also stated that it recovered lethal arms, ammunitions, and bullet-proof vehicles. It dismissed allegations of witch-hunting circulated by the main opposition party, the PDP, which condemned the siege on the Dasukis’ residences; although the DSS stated that it would not violate any human rights, it emphasised that the days when some individuals could act with “impunity” were over.

Buhari later established a 13-man committee headed by Air Vice Marshal John Ode to investigate the previous government’s procurement of hardware and ammunitions from 2007

¹⁰¹ President Muhammadu Buhari appointed new service chiefs on July 13, 2015. On July 14, Sambo Dasuki’s residences were cordoned off by the DSS.

to 2015. An interim report of the audit indicted Dasuki, who allegedly played a major role in the diversion, disbursement, and utilisation of 2 billion USD dollars intended for the procurement of weapons for the military to combat the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern part of the country.

In August 2015, Dasuki was charged with possession of illegal firearms before the courts. He pleaded not guilty and was granted bail on self-recognition. After the submission of an interim report by the panel that had been established to investigate the arms procurement deal, Buhari ordered Dasuki's arrest. Starting on December 1, 2015, Dasuki was arraigned before different courts for various counts of money laundering.¹⁰² He was granted bail on varying conditions, which were met by the accused but largely ignored by law enforcement agencies.¹⁰³ The bail granted to Dasuki by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) court was also ignored by the government. The DSS claimed that Dasuki might jump bail.

One of the judges who granted Dasuki bail was a retired justice called Adeniyi Ademola,¹⁰⁴ who was later recommended for compulsory retirement by the National Judicial Council (NJC) for acts of misconduct. In the meantime, Dasuki consistently maintained in his defence that he had acted on ex-president Jonathan's instructions. However, Jonathan denied awarding a contract worth 2 billion dollars for the procurement of arms.

¹⁰² On December 14, 2015, Dasuki was charged on a 19 counts of money laundering and criminal breach of trust. He was arraigned before Justice Hussain Baba-Yusuf of the Federal High Court Abuja. He was also charged on 22 counts of criminal breach of trust and diversion of public funds on the pretext of purchasing arms for security agencies before Justice Peter Affen of the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory.

¹⁰³ It is important to note that Dasuki and his codefendants in the case were granted bail. However, while others were out on bail, Dasuki was rearrested and has been in the custody of security agencies since 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Adeniyi Ademola is the grandson of Nigeria's first chief justice of Nigeria, Adetokunbo Ademola, who had been appointed by British colonialists in 1958. The younger Ademola was among the seven judges arrested by the DSS in a midnight raid in October 2016, when huge sums of money were recovered. According to the law enforcement agency, Ademola and the other judges had received money from high-profile defendants in corruption cases. The DSS reported that at least 400,000 dollars and 39 million naira in cash were recovered from Ademola's residence.

Among those who benefited from the diversion of the money were prominent politicians (including high-ranking members of the former ruling party, the PDP), media organisations,¹⁰⁵ members of the judiciary, traditional rulers, corporate organisations, and friends, associates and family members of Jonathan's government. According to government prosecutors, under Dasuki's watch, the office of the NSA served as a conduit through which the financial resources earmarked to counter the Boko Haram insurgency were diverted to fund Jonathan's reelection campaign. Dasuki, who had been in detention since 2015, was only released in 2019 after the federal government decided to obey a court order granting him bail.¹⁰⁶

5.2. Scope of analysis

Bearing in mind that the Buhari government had consistently anchored its political campaign on the theme of change, which was strongly reflected in its anticorruption mantra, it remains to be seen how the fight against corruption was publicised in the Nigerian press. The

¹⁰⁵ A total of 120 million naira was paid to the president of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Nduka Obaigbena, as compensation for 12 media organisations whose issues had been confiscated by the military in June 2014 during the Jonathan administration. The Nigerian Army claimed that Boko Haram had used newsprint distribution channels to transport materials, which constituted security risk. However, the military did not find any incriminating materials in the newspaper vans. Rather than go to court, the leadership of NPAN entered into a secret agreement with the NSA for compensation, for which some newspapers submitted claims. According to media reports, out of the 10 million naira budgeted for each media organisation, 1 million naira was to be donated by each newspaper for the administration of the NPAN secretariat. The publications that received a payment of 9 million naira included *ThisDay*, *The Sun*, *The Nation*, *New Telegraph*, *Daily Trust*, *Peoples' Daily*, *Leadership*, *Daily Independence*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Guardian*, and *Business Day*. However, as Dasukigate unfolded, the question of whether to refund the money generated acrimony among newspaper proprietors. While some newspapers, such as *Daily Trust*, *Blueprint*, *Leadership*, and *The Sun* chose to refund the money, others, such as *ThisDay*, *The Nation*, and *Vanguard*, did not. *The Punch*, which did not file a claim for compensation, withdrew its membership of NPAN following the scandal. See

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/162205-nigerian-military-defends-attack-newspapers-describes-routine-security-action.html>

<http://saharareporters.com/2016/01/04/obaigbena-responds-efcc-claims-nigerian-editors-collected-n50-million>

<https://thenationonlineng.net/dasukigate-and-controversial-media-payments/>

<http://saharareporters.com/2015/12/20/dasukigate-sun-newspaper-returns-n9million-it-got-ex-nsa-dasuki>

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/195133-dasukigate-guardian-newspapers-lied-it-was-part-of-npan-decision-to-collect-n120-million-obaigbena.html>

<http://www.homelandnewsng.com/other-news/2990-dasukigate-leadership-newspaper-returns-n9-million-received-nduka-obaigbena>

<http://saharareporters.com/2016/02/02/blueprint-newspaper-returned-n9-million-received-dasuki>

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/195403-dasukigate-punch-newspaper-withdraws-from-npan.html>

<https://thenationonlineng.net/speak-up-npan/>

¹⁰⁶ See 'Why Buhari made U-turn, released Dasuki, Sowore' *The Guardian*, 25 December 2019. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/news/why-buhari-made-u-turn-released-dasuki-sowore/>

Dasukigate case provides a unique opportunity to study patterns in corruption news coverage. This was treated under the following rubrics: (i) the portrayal of main actors, (ii) frame categories, and (iii) the use of sources. However, it is important to first describe the nature of the gathered data before proceeding to a micro-analysis of the most common terms used in headlines of reports. It was assumed that potential readers would at least see the headline of an article, which might persuade them to read the story.

As described in Chapter Four, five mainstream newspapers—*The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, and *ThisDay*—and one online newspaper, *Premium Times*, comprised the representative sample of Nigerian media outlets used in this study. The researcher compiled articles on the arms scandal from the newspapers' archives and subsequently analysed them.

The period covered by the study spans four years: May 29, 2015 to May 28, 2019. The articles published on the scandal included straight news reports, features, and editorials. Two graduate students at the University of Ilorin assisted the researcher in compiling and coding data for each newspaper. The following keywords were used to obtain the most comprehensive sample of reports: “Dasuki,” “Dasukigate,” “ex-NSA,” “\$2billion,” “arms deal,” “arms probe,” “arms scam,” and “armsgate.”

The compilation process yielded a total of 1,124 articles: 224 from *The Punch*, 201 from *The Nation*, 162 from *Daily Trust*, 205 from *Vanguard*, 176 from *ThisDay*, and 156 from *Premium Times*. All articles were screened to ensure that they were fit for inclusion in the dataset. Out of 1,124 articles, 1,044 were straight news stories and features, which represented 93% of the sample; seven were editorials, (1%), and 73 (6%) were opinion articles mainly written by columnists associated with each news outlet. It is important to note that, within the mainstream media, the published opinions of some columnists have become associated with or recognised as the official position of the newspaper, regardless of the outlet's editorial policy.

Because of the relatively large dataset resulting from coverage of the arms deal fraud, the unit of analysis chosen for this study was a single news article. Each news article also represents a dominant frame, as it contains elements such as a headline, a selection of quotations, statistics, concluding statements, and, more importantly, the homogeneity of themes within articles. The data gathered for the study are captured in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 5.

Table 4: Number of articles compiled on the arms deal scandal

Year	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>ThisDay</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	Total	%
2015	45	68	67	79	56	54	369	33
2016	90	85	66	101	68	59	469	42
2017	55	26	13	12	28	26	160	14
2018	26	16	11	8	16	15	92	8
2019	8	6	5	5	8	2	34	3
Total <i>n</i> = 1,124	224	201	162	205	176	156	1124	100*

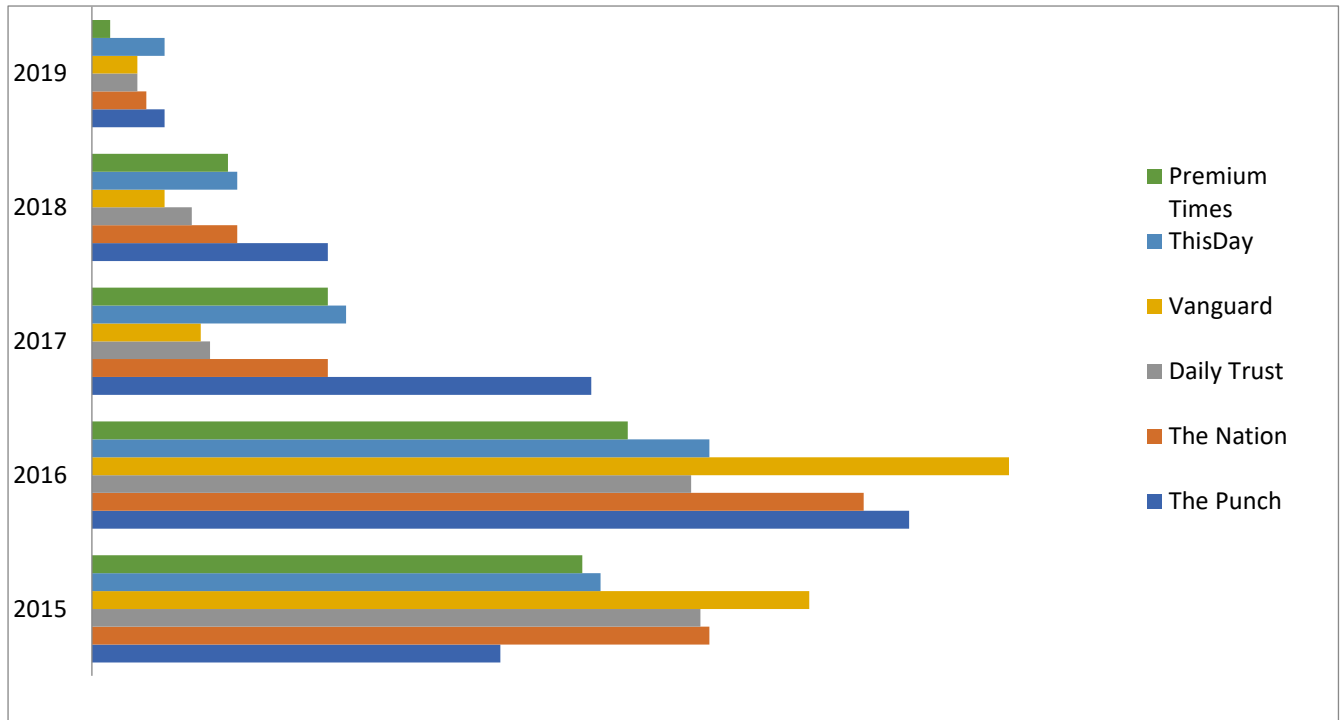
Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Premium Times*, 2019

Table 4 and Figure 5 show that the main period of interest in the coverage of Dasukigate was between 2015 and 2016,¹⁰⁷ as this was when the daily newspapers produced the highest number of stories on the scandal. They also demonstrate that each of the five mainstream newspapers published more articles on the scandal than the online newspaper, *Premium Times*, in terms of the number of articles. Figure 5 shows this spike in coverage between 2015 and 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Coverage of the scandal in 2015 and 2016 constitutes 75% of the total sample size.

*Figures rounded up.

Figure 5



Total number of articles compiled on the arms scandal

5.3. Patterns in portrayal of main actors: the federal government vs. Dasuki

The researcher performed a close reading of the articles to ascertain how the main actors in the arms deal were portrayed in coverage by each newspaper. Examining patterns of how main actors were portrayed, the researcher is able to envision and evaluate what impression would be created on the mind of the readers after reading news reports on corruption. A careful reading of the news reports also allowed the researcher to identify the sources quoted in each article and determine the focus of the story. Specifically, the researcher examined the portrayal of both the federal government, the chief prosecutor in the corruption case, and Dasuki, who was accused of diverting security funds. To this end, the researcher used a summated rating scale to examine patterns in the portrayal of key actors in the scandal, taking into consideration

the intensity of the headline and main text of each news report. A set of questions on patterns of portrayal were formulated to guide the coders, who assigned scores to each article:

1. Overall, how is the federal government treated in the article?
2. Overall, how is Sambo Dasuki treated in the article?

Questions	Weighting
Very negatively portrayed	1
Somewhat negatively portrayed	2
Neutral	3
Somewhat positively portrayed	4
Very positively portrayed	5

Using the weights, a mean cut-off point of 3.00 was calculated and a comparison was made across the six newspapers. A weighted mean score below the cut-off point indicated a negative portrayal of the main actors, while a score above the cut-off point indicated a positive portrayal of the main actors. Table 5 and figures 6 and 7 illustrates patterns in portrayal of main actors in the coverage of the Dasuki arms deal. The media representation of the federal government or Dasuki is considered in our analysis to be “very positively” portrayed if such report is deemed favourable. On the other hand, our analysis portrays that the report on government or Dasuki may be considered favourable by either sides. For example, when a defendant in a corruption case indicated a willingness to refund proceeds from corruption or when the government was encouraged to continue the fight against corruption. Dasuki was considered to be very positively portrayed when, for example, courts ruled in his favour or when individuals or groups defended his cause and advocated for his release.

Meanwhile, a rating of “somewhat positively portrayed” indicated that either party was favourably viewed in an event, but the intensity was to a lesser degree and may not have been

immediately apparent. For instance, if a case led to the defection of members of the opposition party, it was viewed as somewhat positive for the federal government. Conversely, either party was “very negatively portrayed” when the report **explicitly** mentioned difficulties, setbacks, criticisms, shame, or events that were problematic or expected to be problematic. For instance, if either of the key actors in the scandal was sued or charged in court, the article was assigned a very negative portrayal. This is exemplified by the following headline and lead:

More trouble for ex-NSA Dasuki

There is no respite yet for former National Security Adviser (NSA) Col. Sambo Dasuki, despite being granted leave to travel out for treatment by a Federal High Court.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, a somewhat negative portrayal for Dasuki could entail criticisms, problems, and difficulties but less forceful than very negative or just negative parameter. This is demonstrated by the following headline and lead:

EFCC arrests former Minister, others over alleged \$2billion arms deal

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission has arrested a former Minister of State for Finance, Bashir Yuguda, and a number of top officials from the office of the National Security Adviser over the controversial arms procurement scandal surrounding former NSA, Sambo Dasuki.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ See ‘More trouble for ex-NSA Dasuki’ *The Nation*, 4 November 2015. Retrieved from <https://thenationonline.net/more-trouble-for-ex-nsa-dasuki/>

¹⁰⁹ See ‘EFCC arrests former Minister, others over alleged \$2billion arms deal’ *Premium Times*, 30 November 2015, Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/194185-breaking-efcc-arrests-former-minister-others-over-alleged-2billion-arms-deal-2.html>

An example of a somewhat negative portrayal for the federal government is if it was urged to release Dasuki or apply restraint on the prosecution of Dasuki. This is shown by the following headline and lead.

Onaiyekan to Buhari: Don't humiliate people to fight corruption

The Metropolitan Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan has urged the Federal Government to be methodological and avoid humiliating Nigerians in the present administration's quest to rid the nation of corruption.¹¹⁰

A unit of analysis was considered to be neutral when the report is not negatively depicting either the government or Dasuki or when it incorporated the views of both actors in a balanced way and gave equal space to both sides of the story, such that it neither favoured nor condemned either side. In this study, the use of weighted mean scores enabled the researcher to determine the scope of values that each newspaper allotted on the reportage on the key actors. Table 5 below speaks to our analysis here.

To confirm intercoder reliability for the coding criteria, the primary researcher asked a graduate student to code a random sample of 112 articles (10% of the total dataset). Intercoder reliability was then calculated using Holsti's method (1969).

The intercoder reliability was calculated using the formula $2M/N1 + N2$, where M is the total number of decisions that the two coders agree on and where N1 and N2 refer to the number of decisions made by each of the two coders (Mao, 2017). In this case, the following scores were recorded for the five categorical variables, with perfect agreement on articles that were considered neutral.

¹¹⁰ See 'Onaiyekan to Buhari-Don't humiliate people to fight corruption' Daily Trust, 23 July 2015. Retrieved from <https://dailytrust.com/onaiyekan-to-buhari-don-t-humiliate-people-to-fight-corruption>

Very negatively portrayed	0.9
Somewhat negatively portrayed	0.8
Neutral	1
Somewhat positively portrayed	0.8
Very positively portrayed	0.9

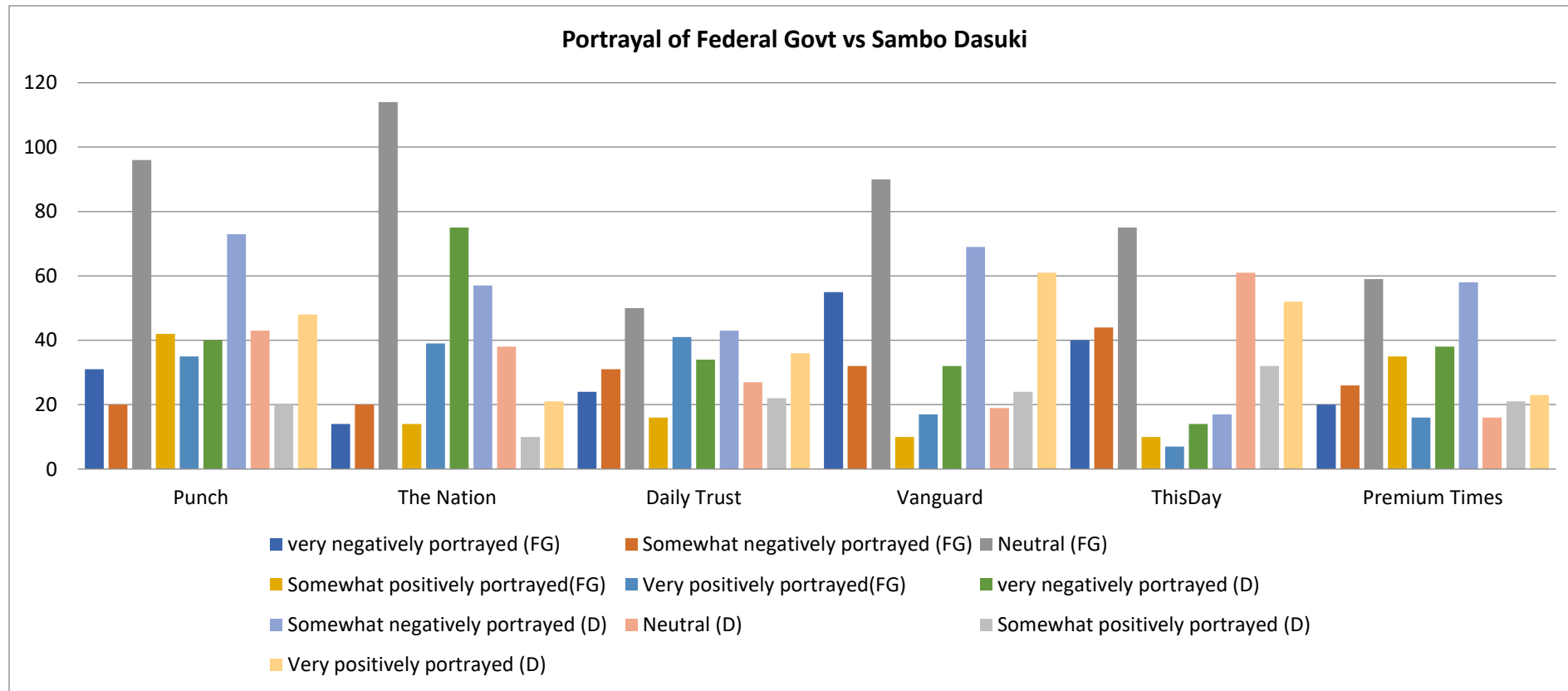
Table 5: Portrayal of Federal Government and Sambo Dasuki by *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, and *Premium Times* (2015–2019)

Newspapers	Federal government					Weighted average	Sambo Dasuki					Weighted average
	Very negatively portrayed	Somewhat negatively portrayed	Neutral	Somewhat positively portrayed	Very positively portrayed		Very negatively portrayed	Somewhat negatively portrayed	Neutral	Somewhat positively portrayed	Very positively portrayed	
<i>The Punch</i>	31	20	96	42	35	3.13	40	73	43	20	48	2.83
<i>The Nation</i>	14	20	114	14	39	3.21	75	57	38	10	21	2.22
<i>Daily Trust</i>	24	31	50	16	41	3.11	34	43	27	22	36	2.89
<i>Vanguard</i>	55	32	90	10	17	2.52	32	69	19	24	61	3.06
<i>ThisDay</i>	40	44	75	10	7	2.43	14	17	61	32	52	3.51
<i>Premium Times</i>	20	26	59	35	16	3.00	38	58	16	21	23	2.57

Reliability test scores: very negatively portrayed 0.9; somewhat negatively portrayed 0.8; neutral 1; somewhat positively portrayed 0.8; and very positively portrayed 0.9.

Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Premium Times*, 2019

Figure 6

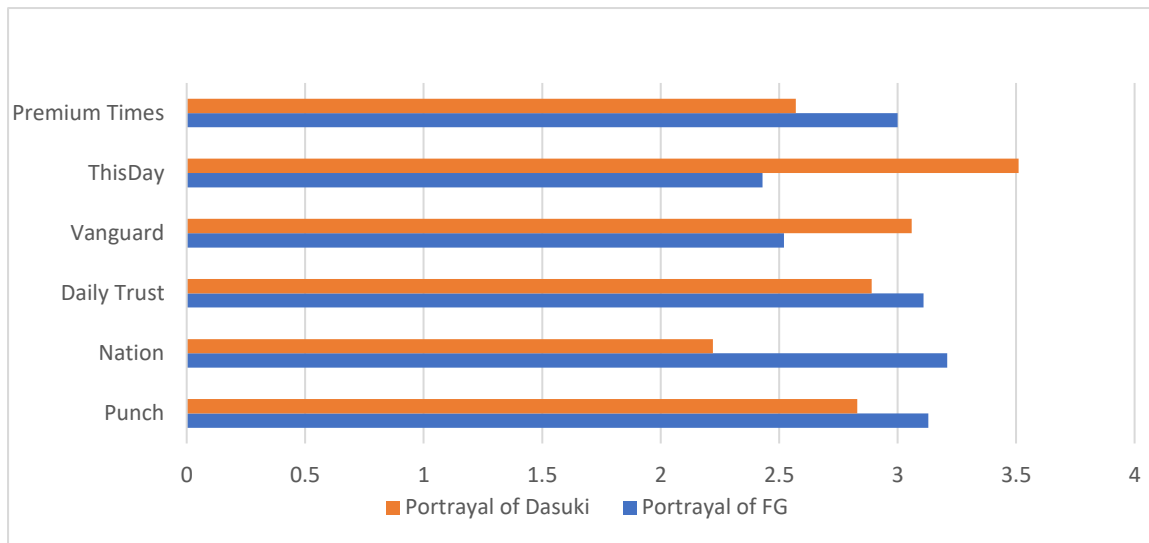


Portrayal of Federal Government vs. Sambo Dasuki

Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Premium Times*, 2019

Table 5 and Figures 6 and 7 show the six newspapers' portrayal of the federal government and Dasuki in the arms scandal during the period under study. It can be seen from figure 7 the weight which each news outlet assigns to the portrayal of key actors in the corruption news. It can be seen that *The Nation*, *The Punch*, and *Daily Trust* portrayed the federal government more positively than Dasuki in their coverage of the scandal, with scores above the cut-off point of 3.00. In Table 5, the weighted scores recorded for *The Nation*, *The Punch*, and *Daily Trust* were: 3.21, 3.13 and 3.11, respectively. By contrast, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay*, which are owned by proprietors from the same geopolitical zone as the former president, had a more negative portrayal of the federal government than Dasuki. *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* recorded scores of 2.52 and 2.43, respectively, which were below the cut-off point. Of the six daily newspapers, only *Premium Times* had a balanced score of 3.00 in its portrayal of the federal government. However, like *The Nation* and *The Punch*, *Premium Times* negatively portrayed Dasuki in its coverage of the scandal, recording a weighted score of 2.57. Nevertheless, as can be seen from figure 6, news articles that were considered "balanced" or "neutral" were prevalent across the six publications in reporting on the scandal. These findings clearly suggest that individuals who are accused of corruption are largely given a negative portrayal in the Nigerian media.

Figure 7



Portrayal of Federal Government vs. Sambo Dasuki

Source: Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Premium Times*, 2019

5.4. Frame Categories

An inductive approach enabled the researcher to identify frames in coverage of the Dasukigate scandal. This form of reasoning was favoured by English philosophers such as Francis Bacon, David Hume, and John Stuart Mill (Chirkov, 2016, p.60). One advantage of inductive reasoning is that it supports researchers to cultivate new knowledge. After the six newspapers were considered, a set of primary frame categories were identified (see Table 6).

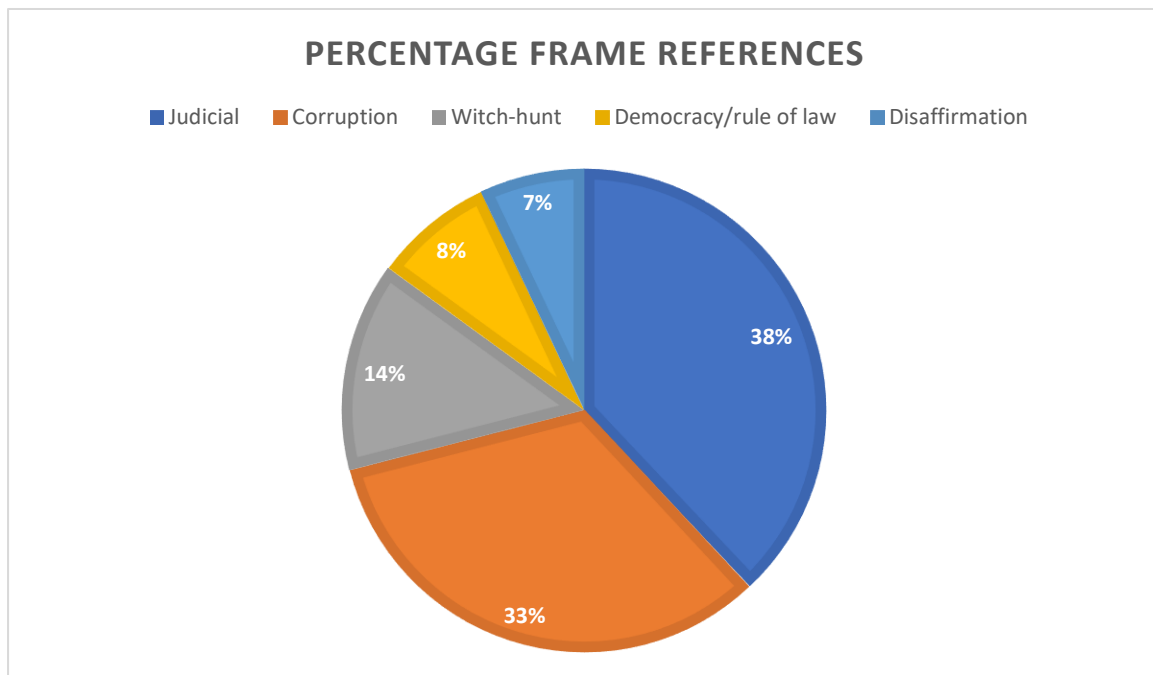
Table 6: Frame categories ranked by number of references

Frame category	Number of references						
	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>ThisDay</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	Total (%)
Judicial	150	107	95	123	138	101	38
Corruption	91	145	119	113	71	82	33
Witch-hunt	46	11	28	76	89	19	14
Democracy/rule of law	34	17	16	28	40	22	8
Disaffirmation	24	18	14	26	15	33	7

* This table does not indicate the total number of articles for the study. This is because some news items contained multiple frame categories (possessed more than one frame,) while others contained no framing statements or issues. The references reported in percentages are intended to serve as a guide to reflect the pattern of the news coverage. This is further illustrated in Figure 8.

Source: Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Premium Times*, 2019

Figure 8



Percentage frame references

Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of *The Punch, The Nation, Daily Trust, Vanguard, ThisDay and Premium Times, 2019*

Figure 8 illustrates the frequency of references for the primary frame categories identified in the coverage of the arms deal. It shows that the main patterns were judicial and corruption themes, which accounted for 71% of frame references in coverage of the Dasukigate case.

5.4.1 Judicial

Among the six newspapers chosen for the study, the dominant theme in the coverage of Dasukigate was the judicial frame, as it was a central theme throughout the study period. The judicial frame refers to court proceedings, bail releases, appeals, adjournments, and

judicial pronouncements on the case. Both the federal government and Dasuki approached the courts to legitimise their actions. While the federal government charged Dasuki on various counts of money laundering, argued on the right to shield witnesses during trial, and the revocation of bail, Dasuki approached the courts (including ECOWAS) to uphold his fundamental right to travel outside Nigeria for medical treatment and to enjoy the bail granted to him by the courts. Analyses of the compiled articles showed that Dasuki was granted bail six times between 2015 and 2018. However, it was only in January 2017 that the corruption trial, which had undergone many adjournments, effectively commenced. The first bail was granted to Dasuki on his self-recognition after the DSS arraigned him in August 2015, when he was charged with possession of illegal arms. Initially, the DSS claimed that it was investigating Dasuki for treasonable felony.

Although all six newspapers provided significant coverage of the search conducted by the DSS of Dasuki's residence, the coverage by *The Nation* stands out due to a time lag between its coverage of the case compared to other newspapers. In addition, *The Nation* provided a larger frame for the story; it was the first media outlet to link Dasuki's travails to corruption and the mismanagement of security funds during his tenure as NSA. This suggested that Dasuki was responsible for the problem. For example, *The Nation* published two distinct reports with the following headlines: "Seized \$15m, others: DSS set to grill ex-NSA Dasuki" and "Dasuki's aide's driver gone with \$5m cash." An excerpt from the latter article reads,

What happened to the \$5m withdrawn from the National Security Adviser's account at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)? The cash vanished under former NSA Col. Sambo Dasuki's watch. This question and more relating to other "curious" withdrawals in the dying days of the former President Goodluck Jonathan administration informed the invasion of Dasuki's homes by Department of State Security (DSS) at the weekend. (*The Nation*, 20 July 2015)

Regarding judicial frames, the issue of corruption was largely communicated within the context of the rule of law. This was perhaps informed by the situational element of place in the social

construction of news on corruption. Readers of the six newspapers often had access to articles containing extensive background on court proceedings, the import of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act¹¹¹ (ACJA), updates on court dates, rulings on bail applications for Dasuki and his codefendants, witness statements, and so on. Statements made by witnesses during the trial were often used to craft sensational headlines to entice the Nigerian public to read the full story. This was a common feature across the newspapers, as exemplified by the following headlines: “Arms deal: Bank confirms Dasuki’s N400m transfer to Metuh”¹¹² (*Daily Trust*; January 28, 2016), “Ex-Director: I delivered \$47m in 11 suitcases to Dasuki” (*The Nation*; December 10, 2015), “Oronsaye¹¹³ got N50m from Dasukigate fund – Witness” (*The Punch*; June 3, 2016), “How Jonathan’s cousin, Robert, got \$40m from ex-NSA, Dasuki – Witness” (*Premium Times*; July 5, 2016), “13.6 billion arms probe – Dasuki, Yuguda, Bafarawa, Others get bail” (*Vanguard*; December 22, 2015), and “Dasuki floors FG, DSS as court grants request for medical trip” (*ThisDay*; November 3, 2015). This pattern of coverage became normalised in coverage of corruption news in the Nigerian mediasphere. The concepts of democracy and rule of law are related to the judicial frame.

5.4.2. Corruption

Another prevalent frame was corruption. Reports were written in a way that provoked outrage against the primitive acquisition of properties by people who had been accused of enriching themselves with public resources. The newspapers predominantly relied on official sources from the EFCC and the government to examine the alleged infractions committed in depth. For example, *The Nation* published the following headline: “Arms deal: Ex-military chiefs offer to refund contract sums.” The accompanying kickers were

¹¹¹ Section 396(3) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) states, “Upon arraignment, the trial of the defendant shall proceed on day-to-day until the conclusion of the trial.”

¹¹² At the time, Olisa Metuh was the national publicity secretary of the main opposition party, the PDP.

¹¹³ Stephen Oronsaye is the former head of the federal civil service.

“EFCC may seize Dasuki’s, others’ assets,” “Targets mansions in Abuja, Kaduna,” and “One top Nigerian, two Israeli suspects sneak out.”

Media narratives in news reports on the scandal, which often cited “a reliable source,” usually focused on what the suspects acquired with government funds. Of the six newspapers, only *Premium Times* conducted independent investigations on military spending, providing full context on corruption in public procurement and military spending. Four articles written between May 15 and 28, 2018 by a *Premium Times* reporter, Emmanuel Ogala, contained the following headlines: “Investigation: When Generals Turn Bandits: Inside the massive corruption in Nigeria’s security contracting,”¹¹⁴ “Investigation: Inside a Multi-Million Dollar ‘Defence Contract Fraud’: Suspects arrested in Israel as Nigeria fails to act,”¹¹⁵ “Investigation: Nigeria’s elusive K38 boats and the stolen billions,”¹¹⁶ and “Investigation: How Nigerian generals clashed over billions meant for military equipment.”¹¹⁷ These headlines paint a grim picture of what happens behind the scenes with regard to the disbursement of security funds in Nigeria. The theme of corruption was reinforced by quotations from sources who preferred to remain anonymous and described the state of helplessness associated with the discourse surrounding corruption. One such source, a defence contractor, stated,

...with the NSA involved I was fine with it,” he said. “Afterall he [Dasuki] is the chief accounting officer of Nigeria’s national security. If he wants to buy it at N100 billion, who am I to say no?”

“If the public servant holding power decided to add to what I have submitted and steal it, what can I do about it?” he asked.

¹¹⁴ Ogala E. (2018) ‘Investigation: When Generals Turn Bandits: Inside the massive corruption in Nigeria’s security contracting’ *Premium Times*, May 15, 2018

¹¹⁵ Ogala, E. (2018) ‘Investigation: Inside a Multi-Million Dollar “Defence Contract Fraud”: Suspects arrested in Israel as Nigeria fails to act,’ *Premium Times*, May 16, 2018

¹¹⁶ Ogala E. (2018) ‘Investigation: Nigeria’s elusive K38 boats and the stolen billions,’ *Premium Times*, May 21, 2018

¹¹⁷ Ogala E. (2018) ‘Investigation: How Nigerian generals clashed over billions meant for military equipment’ *Premium Times*, May 28, 2019

“The best I can do is report it. But who am I reporting to? To him, the very person doing the thing (stealing)? So, this is the objective situation.” (*Premium Times*, May 15, 2018)

The theme of corruption was also related to security, as various media reports indicated that funds were withdrawn from the Central Bank of Nigeria under the guise of national security, which could mean anything (including funding for elections), by those entrusted with the nation’s collective wealth. This further demonstrates the extent to which corruption has undermined governance and the welfare of citizens in Nigeria, hence the need to wage an anticorruption war. Nevertheless, this frame was challenged by *ThisDay* in an end-of-year feature article, in which it enjoined Buhari to desist from “demonising” his predecessor, as this would not make him a better president.¹¹⁸ Yet another dimension of support for the president’s anticorruption crusade came from his harshest critics. This study found that members of the main opposition party, who appeared to have been sidelined under Jonathan’s government and in a share of the loot, demonstrated appreciable support for the anticorruption war.

5.4.3. Witch-hunt

This frame was mainly articulated by the main opposition party, the PDP, and those who were sympathetic to Dasuki. It also paints a picture of vengeance or payback by Buhari against an underdog, Dasuki. *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* provided weight to this framing category. For example, it was reported in *ThisDay* that the EFCC had arrested a member of the ruling party, Jafaru Isa, in relation to the arms deal scandal. While the PDP held that the arrest was stage-managed to provide credibility to the wave of high-profile arrests made in connection with the scandal, *ThisDay* was quick to express its doubts about the anticorruption crusade. The lead to one story¹¹⁹ read, “For the first time since the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led federal government swept to power seven months ago.”

¹¹⁸ Olaleye, O. (2018) Will 2016 reshape Nigeria’s future?’ *ThisDay*, December 30, 2015

¹¹⁹ Soniyi, T. and Iroegbu, S (2016) ‘In a first, EFCC picks up APC Chief, Ja’afaru Isa’ *ThisDay* January 8, 2016

Here, the arms deal case was viewed as a means of decimating the ranks of the main opposition party.

5.4.4. Democracy/rule of law

The theme of democracy/rule of law came into play due to the lockdown of Dasuki's residence by DSS operatives, which marked the early days of the arms scandal. Among the six newspapers, *Premium Times* was quick to remind citizens of Buhari's pledge to maintain the rights and privileges of government officials from previous administrations, as guaranteed by the constitution. The democracy/rule of law frame was reinforced when the federal government did not accede to court orders granting Dasuki bail over the following months. These overshadowed allegations of corruption levelled against Dasuki by the government. Reports from daily newspapers often described the actions of the DSS with the terms "invasion," "invade," "siege," or "raid." This set a negative tone for the government from the beginning of the scandal, as the PDP framed the search on Dasuki's residence as an example of "dictatorship." The focus was on the government's failure to release Dasuki after he was granted bail by the courts. This theme was reinforced by quotations from the lawyers, judges, religious leaders, members of the opposition, and elite members of the news media. Adeniyi Ademola, a judge who presided over one of Dasuki's cases, stated,

It is the duty of all Nigerians to ensure that court orders are obeyed, I am not too happy with what is happening. It is an act of lawlessness and I believe it is not too early for the AGF¹²⁰ to look into this mess.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Attorney General of the Federation.

¹²¹ Ikechukwu, N., (2015)'Siege to Dasuki's home an act of lawlessness-court' Vanguard November 14, 2015

ThisDay and *Vanguard* were among the newspapers which greatly emphasised democracy/rule of law. Another article cited Peter Affen, a different judge, who said the following to the EFCC counsel:

The problem is that you people (EFCC) have too much physical power and you carry it everywhere. This is not a motor park, and you must not be throwing your hands anyhow. You owe the court a duty of deference. Leave your policeman or EFCC powers at the door. Didn't they teach you that in Law School?¹²²

The position advanced here by the judge as reported in the press was to rebuke the agency of government fighting corruption rather than focusing on the act of corruption being fought. This is not a sporadic instance but a common feature which often blames the process more loudly than the scandal itself.

5.4.5. Disaffirmation

The theme of disaffirmation was characterised by denials, especially after series of arrests made by law enforcement agencies, particularly the EFCC. This theme can be traced to the early weeks of December 2015 and January 2016. It is also one of the most dominant and recurring themes in reports on the arms deal scandal. An analysis of the news reports showed that disaffirmation tended to be voiced by politicians who were mentioned as beneficiaries of the security funds received from Dasuki. Furthermore, membership in this elite group cut across the geographical, linguistic, religious, and political divide.

In many of the articles corresponding to the theme of disaffirmation and published by the five mainstream newspapers, the pattern was often a case of "I got no money from Dasuki but . . ."

Under this theme, frequently mentioned politicians included a former governor of Sokoto State and a PDP member, Attahiru Bafarawa; the PDP's national publicity secretary, Olisa Metuh;

¹²² ThisDay editorial, 'EFCC and the Rule of Law' March 29, 2016

and a media mogul and chieftain of the PDP, Raymond Dokpesi. Other named figures included aides and associates of Jonathan, such as Doyin Okupe, a former senior special assistant on public affairs who was often referred to as “Jonathan’s attack dog”; Femi Fani Kayode, the director of media and publicity at Jonathan’s presidential campaign organisation; and former finance ministers Ngozi Okonjo Iweala and Nenadi Usman. In addition, several statesmen were named: Tanko Yankassai from the north, Bode George and Olu Falae from the South West, Iyorchia Ayu from the Middle Belt, Tony Anenih and Peter Odili from the South, and Jim Nwobodo from the South East. Furthermore, the media outlets named corporate organisations and public relations organisations and minor political parties, such as the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Labour Party (LP), Accord Party (AP), Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD), and Action Alliance (AA). Other beneficiaries included senior military officers such as the former chief of defence staff, Alex Badeh, and the former chief of air staff, Adesola Amosun. Even Buhari, whom critics accused of keeping gifts tainted by corruption, was forced to clarify that, following a Boko Haram terrorist attack on his convoy in Kaduna in 2014, he had received two vehicles from the sitting president, Jonathan. In addition to being a sympathy gift, they were also his entitlements as a former head of state under the Remuneration of Former Presidents and Heads of State (and Other Ancillary Matters) Act of 1999.

A troubling aspect of reporting on the scandal was that, while some individuals were named and prosecuted, others were named but not prosecuted. Those in the former category included Metuh, the spokesman of the PDP, and the latter category included statesmen such as Yankassai, George, and Falae, who appear to have been shielded from prosecution. Another aspect of the theme of disaffirmation implicitly suggested shaming. For example, an article in the *ThisDay* referred to a beneficiary of the arms deal scandal who had not been prosecuted and had defected to the ruling party as follows:

These are Dasukigate fugitives and food is ready politicians. Are they not those who collected money from Dasuki and allocated 14,175 votes to Buhari as against over 500,000 votes they allocated to former president, Dr Goodluck Jonathan? Is there no shame in the country again? They are shameless and the unfortunate thing is that they cannot win their wards. (*ThisDay*, 9 January 2016)

Many articles that corresponded to the theme of disaffirmation seemed to attribute the corruption scandal solely to Dasuki and Jonathan. For example, *Premium Times* devoted significant coverage to the disproportionate sums¹²³ paid out to mainstream media organisations through Nduka Obaigbena, the president of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN). Inflated compensation was dispensed through his private company, General Hydrocarbons Limited, to 12 newspaper publishers whose issues had been confiscated by the military in June 2014 under the Jonathan government. Initially, some of these organisations denied having received any money from the NSA; they later reversed their positions and claimed that it was paid as compensation for the loss of their newspaper copies. Furthermore, the publisher of the *ThisDay*, Obaigbena, suggested that the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) also benefited from the arms deal funds, which strengthened the theme of disaffirmation.

On the key questions of Dasuki's role in the scandal and whether he acted on his own or followed Jonathan's instructions, the six newspapers offered several interpretations, which varied over the period of the study. *The Punch* was blunt in its criticism of the ex-president by attributing responsibility for the scandal to him. For instance, the opening paragraph of an editorial stated that Jonathan's defence of Dasuki "rubbed salt into the wound of his

¹²³ Obaigbena allegedly received 670 million naira from the Office of the National Security Adviser as compensation for a 2012 attack on the headquarters of his media organisation, *ThisDay*, in Abuja by the terrorist group, Boko Haram. According to Obaigbena, an agreement between the Jonathan administration and other members of NPAN was reached, and 120 million naira would be paid to the organisation as compensation to media outlets that the military had confiscated newspaper issues from. Some media organisations which received compensation reportedly returned the money. Obaigbena also refunded 350 million of the 550 million naira paid to him, with a promise to refund an addition 200 million naira. See Alechenu, J., Soriwei, F. & Ameh, J. (2016) '\$2.1bn scandal: ThisDay publisher, Obaigbena, returns N350m' *The Punch*, February 4, 2016

170 million victims.” In an editorial on the arms deal, *Daily Trust* was similarly stern in its criticism of Dasuki, noting that it was not in the interest of the nation to have a powerful NSA with a strong staff that was accountable only to the president. It further argued that “no serving NSA should be placed in a position where he must commit illegalities to serve the nation with ‘the best intentions.’” In an article published by *Vanguard*, a respected columnist at the newspaper, Dele Sobowale, laid the blame for the scandal at the feet of Jonathan and his finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala. He asserted that, by turning the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA) “into an award and settlement centre,”

they, not Dasuki, had ruined their reputations and the name of Nigeria forever and Nigeria for a long time to come. By turning the ONSA to a funds disbursing office, they bastardised it and rendered it ineffective in its fundamental role. Why hold Dasuki when the real authors of this monumental scandal are still home? Let him go.¹²⁴

Further in the study, the researcher classified the range of sources employed in the framing of the scandal.

5.5. Use of sources in coverage of the arms deal

1. Federal government: This category includes President Muhammed Buhari himself, his media and publicity aides, and members of his cabinet who speak on his behalf.
2. Law enforcement agencies: This category comprises law enforcement agencies such as the DSS, the EFCC, the Nigerian Army, and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and its spokespersons.
3. Unidentified or anonymous sources and whistleblowers: These are sources who contributed to the story but preferred not to have their name published in print.
4. Sambo Dasuki: Dasuki was a key actor in the arms scandal. statements from Dasuki himself or PRNigeria on Dasuki’s behalf.

¹²⁴ Sobowale, D. (2015) ‘Was Dasuki only obeying orders from above?’ *Vanguard*, December 20, 2015

5. Ruling party: The ruling political party is the APC.
6. Members of the opposition: This category includes leaders from the opposition party, the PDP, and smaller political parties mentioned in the discourse. This category also includes the former president, Goodluck Jonathan, and other veteran politicians and statesmen who defend the PDP's cause.
7. Dasuki's lawyers: These are the defence lawyers who represented Dasuki in the courts and whose quotations were used in reports.
8. Judges: This category covers judges who presided over the case. They include judges from the lower court, the appellate court, or the Supreme Court who were quoted in reports.
9. Government lawyers or prosecution: This category includes lawyers, such as the director of public prosecution at the Ministry of Justice and private lawyers who were engaged by and acted on behalf of the federal government and were quoted in the news report.
10. Witnesses: These include individuals who were brought in to testify during the corruption trial, such as detectives, government officials, bureau de change operators, bankers, and representatives of corporate organisations cited in the scandal.
11. Media organisations: These are sources from media organisations or the leadership of a media group who were quoted in reports.
12. Civil society organisations: This category refers to representatives of non-governmental organisations that promote human rights and advocate for cause whose quotations were used in reports. Civil society organisations are particular about due process being followed in the fight against corruption. One example is the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA).

13. Pressure groups: These are protest groups whose views were included in news stories about the arms scandal, such as the Arewa Youth Forum (AYF), the Muhammadu Buhari Osinbajo Dynamic Support Group, and the Association of Sokoto State Women in Politics (SSAWP).
14. Experts: These comprise sources who were quoted in reports for their knowledge of the law to shed light on or buttress a particular point.
15. Dasuki’s codefendants: These are individuals who were arraigned alongside Dasuki or related to the arms deal.
16. Socio-cultural or ethnic organisations: These are sources from organisations that promote the interests of an ethnic group.
17. Religious leaders and groups: These are religious leaders and groups related to their faith.
18. Members of the public: This category includes interested citizens cited in reported.
19. Family members of the accused: These include family members of Dasuki, Dokpesi, and others.
20. Miscellaneous: This category encompasses sources that do not fit into the above categories.

Table 7: Frequency of sources used in the coverage of the Dasuki arms deal scandal

Source type	Number of references	Percentage
Unidentified or anonymous sources	118	16.3
Law enforcement agencies	96	13.2
Federal government	83	11.5
Members of the opposition	76	10.5
Sambo Dasuki or PRNigeria	61	8.4
Dasuki’s codefendants	59	8.1

Witnesses	41	5.6
Dasuki's lawyers	32	4.4
Ruling party	25	3.4
Experts	22	3.0
Pressure groups	18	2.4
Civil society organisations	17	2.3
Socio-cultural or ethnic organisations	12	1.6
Government lawyers or prosecution	11	1.5
Miscellaneous	11	1.5
Media organisations	10	1.3
Judges	9	1.2
Religious leaders and groups	8	1.1
Members of the public	8	1.1
Family members of accused	8	1.1
Total	723	

Table 4 shows that unidentified or anonymous sources were most prominent in coverage of the scandal. The next most-quoted sources were law enforcement agencies to reveal the propriety or impropriety of their actions, government spokespersons and other relevant officials to sift the grain from the chaff in their presentations, and members of the main opposition to essentially present the other side of the coin. Anonymous sources were used to establish the witch-hunt frame; this was based on the notion that Dasuki was paying the price for his role in Buhari's arrest as military head of state when he was ousted in a military coup on the eve of Sallah¹²⁵ in 1985.

¹²⁵ Sallah is an annual Islamic festival to mark the end of the Ramadan fast.

5.6. Discussion

5.6.1. Main findings

The present case study seeks to examine patterns in the news coverage of the arms deal.

The main findings are as follows:

1. The federal government was portrayed more favourably than Dasuki and his co-defendants in coverage of the arms deal scandal. *The Nation*, *The Punch*, and *Daily Trust* gave a more positive portrayal of the federal government than the other newspapers under study. While *Premium Times* presented a balanced portrayal of the federal government, its portrayal of Dasuki was more negative, similar to the three news aforementioned outlets. By contrast, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* portrayed the federal government more negatively than Dasuki, thus exhibiting ethnic loyalty.
2. Five primary frames were identified in the corpus: judicial, corruption, witch-hunt, democracy/rule of law, and disaffirmation. The judicial frame was the most prevalent theme and appeared throughout the study period, which implies that the issue of corruption in Nigeria was largely communicated within the context of democracy/rule of law. The media mostly relied on anonymous sources to frame the arms deal scandal. These findings also indicate that news coverage of corruption went beyond “a mere regurgitation of court proceedings,” as argued by Komolafe, Nkereuwem, and Kalu-Amah (2019, p.14).

5.6.2. ThisDay

Corruption was largely presented as a “threat” to Nigeria’s democracy and rule of law by *This Day*. From the beginning of the scandal, the newspaper focused on the witch-hunt frame, emphasising the themes of “dictatorship” and “vengeance,” as articulated by the

main opposition party. By emphasising this frame, *ThisDay* likened Buhari to a “proverbial leopard that does not change its spot.”¹²⁶ Thus when the federal government levelled charges of money laundering against Dasuki, this was likely to be perceived as a political “witch-hunt” by *ThisDay* readers since the former NSA had been portrayed as an underdog. By opposing the screening of witnesses requested by the federal government during preliminary hearings at the corruption trial, Dasuki’s counsel, Joseph Daudu (who was frequently cited by *ThisDay*) noted, “Even in a trial of treasonable felony and coup d’état, the witnesses are not hidden and we are in a democracy.”¹²⁷ This position of the counsel was supported by expressions such as “Tell the world that the ex-NSA is still under house arrest despite court order, and his health is under threat knowing his medical condition” and headlines such as “The Arms Deal Probe -Anti-Graft War or Score settling?”¹²⁸ Such patterns recurred during the reporting of the scandal. Thus, in stories on the arms deal scandal, *ThisDay* often relied on quotations from members of the main opposition party and Dasuki’ lawyers to frame the issue. Statements from judges who ruled in Dasuki’s favour were used as authoritative accounts of the matter and frequently cited in the newspaper’s reports.

During the period under analysis, there was scant coverage of support for the federal government’s insistence to bring Dasuki to justice for the diversion of security funds; a report on the matter had been released to the public by the arms probe panel that indicted Dasuki. In this case, *ThisDay* portrayed Buhari as incompetent and asserted that he should be held responsible for the shortcomings in his governance. It not only claimed that the

¹²⁶ Adeyemo, A. & Oyeyipo S. (2015) When the rule of law and political correctness tangle’ *ThisDay* November 23, 2019.

¹²⁷ Iroegbu, S. (2015) ‘FG files fresh money laundering charges against Dasuki, asks for secret trial’ *ThisDay* October 27, 2015

¹²⁸ See Uwugiaren, I., Adeyemo, A. and Oyeyipo, S. (2015) ‘The Arms Deal Probe: Anti-graft War or Score Settling?’ *ThisDay* December 7 2015. Iroegbu, S. (2015) ‘Arms Deal-Lawyers fault Buhari’s arrest order on Dasuki’ *ThisDay* November 22, 2015

Buhari administration disregarded court orders that were favourable to Dasuki but also that the legal action initiated against Dasuki was merely a ploy to divert citizens' attention away from the president's inability to effectively govern the country. It appears to the researcher that this interpretation by a newspaper from the South South was rooted in the broader ethnic structure and identity of Nigerian society. It spreads the misconception that a political leader from the northern part of the country cannot be trusted to effectively govern the nation, which is based on prejudice. Moreover, the idea that the Buhari government's anticorruption crusade was having a negative impact on the economy in terms of real estate and discouraging investors and foreign investment in Nigeria contributes to this broader structure. Lexical choices used by members of the opposition to describe the Dasuki scandal included assertions that the former NSA was subjected to "ruthless persecution and misrepresentation," a "horrendous media trial," the "tyrant Buhari," and more. In addition, a win or loss context was employed by *ThisDay* to interpret court rulings that were favourable to Dasuki.

5.6.3. Vanguard

A narrative of corruption was rapidly established in *Vanguard's* coverage of the arms scandal. The newspaper reported that \$9.3 million USD in hard currency meant for procurement of arms under the Jonathan administration was seized by the South African government for money laundering. This paper from south should be credited for acting the role of watchdog in that coverage. In addition, on the frame of "witch-hunt" pushed by the main opposition, the newspaper published reports that seemed to suggest why the fight against terrorism had failed under Jonathan's watch. For example, a report written by *Vanguard's* Abuja bureau chief, Emma Ujah, cited security sources who specifically attributed blame for the black-market attempt to purchase arms, to the United States and Nigeria's other traditional allies for failing to support the country with sale of the required

sophisticated weapons in the fight against terrorism. The underlying narrative here suggests a lenient outlook to those involved in the arms deal case. The concluding paragraph of the report states,

President Buhari's panel would discover at the end of its sitting that it was not possible for the Jonathan administration to have reduced Boko Haram to the level it left it without having to bend backwards on several fronts to secure the right weapons and technical expertise¹²⁹.

As in *ThisDay*, the narrative of the fight against corruption was a highly contested one in *Vanguard's* reporting. Again, the dominant narrative was dictatorship; Buhari was depicted as the cause of the problem, a sentiment espoused by the political class and echoed by pressure groups sympathetic to Dasuki, which continued to advocate for caution on the "anticorruption war." *Vanguard's* portrayal of corruption offered insights into this matter of cautioning Buhari because of his past rather than blame the accused. It reported that Dasuki had not been invited by the investigation panel to present his own side of the story. Indeed, as the chairman of the *Vanguard* editorial board, Ocherome Nnanna, wrote, "Dasuki could be a dress rehearsal for a re-launch of 1984 reign of terror on our collective civil liberties disguised as a fight against graft."¹³⁰

After the 2015 national elections, when the largely Christian South South lost political power to the largely Muslim north, the government's anticorruption efforts were viewed by leading members of the opposition (who were from the southern part of the country) as a calculated act of victimisation. *Vanguard* newspaper advanced a position that the political victimisation of followers of Jonathan was unjustified. This was in consideration of the fact that Jonathan conceded defeat even before the final results of the elections were made public, a rarity in the

¹²⁹ See Ujah, E. (2015) "How America, West frustrated Jonathan's anti-Boko Haram war' *Vanguard*, September 6, 2015.

¹³⁰ Nnanna, O. (2015) "Buhari Batters Dasuki While We Watch' *Vanguard*, November 27, 2015

nation's political history. It was intended to deepen democracy in Nigeria. Thus, elite political actors who are accused of corrupt acts by the state often make deliberate attempts to whip up political and religious sentiment by making recourse to morality. For example, one *Vanguard* headline read, "Arrest of Kayode Are, Dasuki, Dokpesi, others: We will never be intimidated, God is with us – Fani Kayode."¹³¹ Ruth Marshall-Fratani (1998) wrote,

Religion has its official uses as well – leaders make much of their "devoutness" as Christians and Muslims, calling publicly on God to help them in their task of national redemption, and bargaining with, or buying off prominent religious leaders, yet all the while denouncing "fanaticism" and the evil machinations of those who seek to use religion to "political ends." (p.302).

Thus, a loss of political power must not only be understood within the context of prolonged military rule in Nigeria, but it also feeds into fears about the marginalisation of the south. While this is an uncomfortable perspective that is widely held in the south, it contributes to bias and hate speech against the incumbent president, his religion, his ethnic group, and his political party. This underlying pressure was given expression by the media outlet favoured in this area. Thus, the anticorruption crusade is viewed as punitive action from the government.

That said, in its bid to show objectivity and fulfil its primary role as a watchdog, *Vanguard* introduced a balancing act. This is evidenced by an editorial in which it tacitly supported the probe: "if it is established that people given the sacred duty of spending public funds to protect the nation and its people actually diverted some or all of the funds to private uses, then the culprits must be brought to face the full weight of the law and proceeds of their criminal activities recovered."¹³²

¹³¹ See *Vanguard* December 3, 2015

¹³² *Vanguard* Editorial, "Unravelling the Arms Deals" December 10, 2015

5.6.4. *The Nation*

The narrative articulated by the Buhari government on the anticorruption war was celebrated by *The Nation* in its coverage of the arms deal scandal. From when Buhari assumed office, the paper continually restates the capacity of the president to effectively tackle corruption. It often presents supportive coverage of actions of Buhari to fight corruption in the defence sector. It often posits the actions of Buhari to prosecute Dasuki should not be viewed from his past record as a military dictator. Further to this, an article put the blame squarely on Dasuki. The article observed that the procurement of weapons, which used to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, had been taken over by the former NSA. *The Nation* noted that Dasuki had “neutered the influence and effectiveness” of the ministry as a result. One article observed that

his removal from office, the raid on his residences and subsequent arrest hardly sums up as a piteous case of political witch hunt outside the perimeters of his political camp; pundits and greater segments of the citizenry applaud the decision to probe the former NSA, emphasizing the need to prosecute him in accordance with due process stipulated by the Nigerian constitution. (*The Nation*, July 25, 2015)

Beyond this, *The Nation* immediately framed its reporting in terms of the impact of corruption on the war against terrorism. It published series of articles on whether the conviction of 66 Nigerian soldiers in 2014 for mutiny during the Boko Haram insurgency was justified in view of the arms deal scandal unearthed by the presidential panel. In one article, the newspaper asked, “Can a soldier decline to fight if not adequately kitted to do so?”¹³³ Thus, for many of its readers, the jailing of Dasuki and other recipients of the diverted security funds would undoubtedly be a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, this narrative implicitly discredited politicians accused of corruption while upholding the sanctity of the government’s anticorruption efforts. However, critics of the government would construe such narratives as convicting the culprit in the media before the

¹³³ Egbe, R. (2016) \$2.1b arms scandal: Do mutinous soldiers deserve pardon? *The Nation*, January 20, 2016.

actual trial in the law court given that they originated from a media outlet owned by a Muslim and a national leader in the ruling party. To them, the corruption allegations were unsubstantiated news reports. Conversely, supporters of the president and of the government would view such narratives as representing the wishes of the electorate, who voted for Buhari to fight corruption.

Regarding the use of sources, *The Nation* depended on anonymous sources in security circles, the EFCC, and the presidency. To describe its sources, the newspaper often used descriptors such as “a highly placed source,” “a well-placed source,” “a reliable source,” “an authoritative source,” and “a top source in EFCC” to construct news about the arms deal scandal.

5.6.5 *Daily Trust*

The discourse on corruption in *Daily Trust* focused on support for the federal government’s anticorruption campaign, which was waged according to the rule of law. Like *The Nation*, *Daily Trust* published many articles in support of the government; in particular, its reporting consistently highlighted Buhari’s ability to tackle corruption in the polity. Corruption was seen as a problem of the political class, in which attaining federal political office was regarded as an opportunity to participate in self-enrichment. To this end, *Daily Trust* focused on the main opposition party, the PDP, as the root cause of the arms deal scandal, dwelling extensively on the internal crisis of the party, especially in 2016. It provided an outlet to members of the opposition who expressed support for the Buhari anticorruption war. One such source stated,

So many wrongs have been committed and this is the right time to correct the anomaly. The PDP people ate for many years without inviting anybody. They didn’t invite any opposition to join them in the feast, but they are now complaining. Buhari

must arrest all those that soiled their hands in the loot including former President Jonathan.¹³⁴ (*Daily Trust*, January 17, 2016)

The frames of “witch-hunt,” “vengeance,” and “dictatorship,” which were prevalent in *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* (both South South newspapers) were countered in *Daily Trust*’s coverage of the scandal, as the newspaper’s framing bolstered the president’s image through news reports that restated the government’s commitment to the rule of law.

In an article, one of its senior editors, Mahmud Jega, observed that Buhari was very concerned about the people viewing him as a dictator. He likened the president to “an alpha-male African lion charging at ravenous hyenas” but whose “claws and canines have been clipped by the Constitution.” A 2017 survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre asked participants whether a system in which a strong leader could make decisions without interference from parliament or the courts was a good or a bad way of governing the country.¹³⁵ Thirty-eight percent of respondents answered that it was a “total good,” which suggests an admiration for autocracy, at least to some extent, and stresses the need for elected leaders to deliver on their electoral promises in light of the widespread socio-economic challenges that confront the country. This finding also underscores a lack of confidence in the Nigerian judicial system.

Another dimension of the coverage of corruption by *Daily Trust* is a focus on morality and offering solutions. For example, the federal government published a list of accused persons for corruption; the main opposition party also released its own list of looters, which indicted officials serving in the Buhari government. The newspaper, which was critical of the government’s position on the matter, stated that it should not have “risen to

¹³⁴ Idris H. and Terzungwe S, (2016) ‘Arms Deal- Can Jonathan survive the pressure’ *Daily Trust*, January 17, 2016

¹³⁵ See Pew Research Centre. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/10/16/democracy-widely-supported-little-backing-for-rule-by-strong-leader-or-military/>

the bait” and that its reactions could be leveraged by defendants in the scandal who had not yet been convicted, as they could argue in a court of law that they might not receive a fair trial from the government.¹³⁶

5.6.6. *The Punch*

The Punch has also been noted for its support for the Buhari government’s anticorruption crusade. For example, in an editorial on the arms deal scandal,¹³⁷ the newspaper emphasised that corruption had aggravated insecurity, particularly with regard to women and children. In addition, *The Punch* posited that Dasuki and his co-defendants were to blame for their misdeeds under the Jonathan administration. Whereas those who viewed the investigation of Dasuki and others as a witch-hunt described it as carrying forth a vendetta. *The Punch* published a feature story which suggested that politicians used illness as a pretext to evade justice; this was around the period when Dasuki sought leave from the court to travel outside Nigeria for medical treatment. The newspaper reinforced this stance by obtaining quotations from sources who agreed with the government’s anticorruption crusade. It justified this position by documenting examples of politicians who had used ill health as an excuse to avoid responding to corruption charges.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, *The Punch* is reputed for presenting both sides of a coin in its reporting. On the question of whether Jonathan should be questioned over the arms deal scandal, the newspaper presented the views of known partisans on the issue in the headlines of two reports published on December 20, 2015,¹³⁹ which read “Jonathan should be questioned

¹³⁶ See Daily Trust Editorial, ‘The ‘Treasury Looters’ Lists’, Daily Trust, 11 April 2018, p.45. Retrieved from <https://dailytrust.com/the-treasury-looters-lists>

¹³⁷ See ‘\$2bn arms scam, test of Buhari’s anti-graft war’ *The Punch*, 6 December 2015, Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20151207124219/http://www.punchng.com/?p=13255>

¹³⁸ See Akinkuotu, E. (2015) ‘Of corruption, sickness and justice’ *The Punch*, 29 December 2015. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20151229032635/http://www.punchng.com/of-corruption-sickness-and-justice/>

¹³⁹ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20151220111106/http://www.punchng.com/jonathan-should-be-questioned-over-arms-scam-keyamo/> Also see:

on arms scam – Keyamo” and “Probe Jonathan’s predecessors first – Briggs.”

Incorporating these two opposite perspectives suggests that *The Punch* was mindful of what content would be of interest to its readers.

5.6.7 *Premium Times*

Among the six newspapers under study, *Premium Times* set the bar in terms of conducting independent investigative journalism on the arms scandal. An exclusive report published in *Premium Times* on December 9, 2015 revealed another aspect of the origins of the \$2 billion dollars arms scandal. The online newspaper reported that Jonathan and a former minister of finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, had approved the partial transfer of funds recovered from the illegal holdings of a late head of state, Sani Abacha, to Dasuki a few weeks before the beginning of the 2015 general elections. *Premium Times* reported that it had obtained a letter dated and signed by Okonjo-Iweala on January 20, 2015 and addressed to Jonathan; it concerned the transfer of 300 million U.S. dollars and 5.5 million British pounds to the ONSA after Dasuki requested the funds for the purchase of weapons and security equipment to counter the Boko Haram insurgency. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala wrote, “given the peculiar nature of security and intelligence transactions, we would expect the NSA to account to Your Excellency [i.e., Jonathan] for the utilisation of the funds,” which the newspaper noted was “a clear violation of Nigeria’s fiscal responsibility law.”¹⁴⁰ This was because the funds were not appropriated by

<https://web.archive.org/web/20151220110937/http://www.punchng.com/probe-jonathans-predecessors-first-briggs/>

¹⁴⁰ See Nicholas Ibekwe, ‘How Jonathan, Okonjo-Iweala illegally diverted N61.4 billion Abacha loot to NSA, Sambo Dasuki’ *Premium Times*, December 9, 2015, retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/194870-how-jonathan-okonjo-iweala-illegally-diverted-n61-4-billion-abacha-loot-to-nsa-sambo-dasuki.html>

the National Assembly before being transferred from the Central Bank of Nigeria. Similarly, *Premium Times'* extensive coverage of this secret deal and the relationship between Dasuki and the influential proprietors of some mainstream newspapers was unparalleled. Through its reports, the newspaper demonstrated that the media had a duty to demonstrate that professionalism is a priority. Thus, corruption was portrayed as an institutional problem in Nigeria that goes beyond the Buhari administration's current anticorruption campaign.

This chapter presented how the six news outlets chosen for this study covered the arms deal case involving Dasuki. As a main actor in the scandal, his portrayal was largely negative and likely resulted in reputational damage and the public's evaluation of him. In addition, the political careers of notable individuals mentioned in association with Dasuki, such as Metuh and Bafarawa, were possibly also negatively impacted. This topic may be examined in further studies. The abovementioned findings led the researcher to consider the factors that make corruption news *newsworthy*. Thus, the news values used by media outlets to frame corruption-related stories informed the focus of the next case study, which relates to the judiciary branch of the government.

CHAPTER 6

6.0 Case Study II: The False Declaration of Assets

6.1 Background

The second corruption-related case study concerns the false declaration of assets by a former chief justice of Nigeria (CJN), Walter Onnoghen. It began on January 7, 2019 with a petition submitted by a group called the Anti-Corruption and Research Based Data Initiative to the Code of Conduct Bureau. The petition alleged the non-declaration of assets by the head of Nigeria's judicial arm, Onnoghen, stating that he had been involved in suspected official corruption and engaged in a series of financial transactions revealed from his different bank balances which were unjustifiable in view of his lawful remuneration. The charges levelled against him included the following:

- Breach of the constitution by failing to declare his assets from 1989 (when he was appointed a judicial officer) to 2016 (when he became the CJN)
- Being in possession of funds which were not attributable to his known, provable, and legitimate sources of income
- Deposits of up to \$1,716,000 USD in his domiciliary account, whose sources he could not account for
- “Pecuniary” gifts paid into his account by lawyers¹⁴¹

The charges were then brought before the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) and allegedly leaked to the media by the government. Shortly after, Onnoghen was arraigned before the CCT after initially declining to show up for the trial. Upon admitting that he had forgotten to list some of his assets, Onnoghen was immediately suspended by the government following an ex parte motion granted by the CCT, and a new CJN was sworn in. The rationale behind this swift

¹⁴¹ See details of allegations against Onnoghen by the EFCC.

‘Exclusive: As NJC sits over Onnoghen, EFCC details criminal allegations’ The Cable, 3 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thecable.ng/exclusive-as-njc-sits-over-onnoghen-efcc-details-criminal-allegations-full-text>

action was that the entries in the different bank accounts that Onnoghen had claimed to forget clearly expose him.

In Onnoghen's defence before the CCT, his lawyers argued that the former CJN's admission did not amount to a confession. They referred to Section 3d of the Code of Conduct Bureau Act, which states that "where the person concerned makes a written admission of such breach or non-compliance, no reference to the Tribunal shall be necessary." Citing precedents, Onnoghen's lawyers also noted that only the National Judicial Council (NJC)¹⁴² was empowered to discipline judicial officers and that Onnoghen could only be removed from office if the president was supported by a two-thirds majority in the Senate, as stipulated by the Constitution of Nigeria. Nevertheless, while the CCT trial progressed, the EFCC also investigated Onnoghen and forwarded its petition to the NJC.

This corruption case generated outrage, particularly from the main opposition party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which suspended its political campaigns over the matter. The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the umbrella body for Nigerian lawyers, also called for a nationwide boycott of the courts by its members over Onnoghen's suspension. In addition, different interest groups and individuals imbued the issue with ethnic and religious considerations. The scandal also elicited reactions from nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and members of the European Union (EU), which drew attention to how the suspension of the CJN could impact the perception of the forthcoming general elections. In the latter, the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari, would seek re-election for a second term. Nevertheless, the NJC recommended Onnoghen's compulsory retirement from office for misconduct. However, before the president could act on the recommendation, Onnoghen

¹⁴² The CJN is also the Chairman of the NJC.

resigned from office, which was clearly a face-saving device as his integrity has been seriously impugned.

6.2. Scope of analysis

In this study, the researcher focused on patterns of newsworthiness in the six selected newspapers' coverage of the corruption case involving Onnoghen by examining the news values that they used to frame stories on the scandal. Galtung and Ruge (1965, p.58), the forerunners of news values scholarship, relied on psychological perceptions to examine the flow of news from abroad.

Galtung and Ruge identified 12 factors that appeared to be constant in the determination of newsworthiness: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to people, and reference to something negative. The scholars contended that events characterised by these factors were more likely to be considered newsworthy. The last four factors, which the scholars described as “culture-bound” (1965, p.58), are especially relevant to the current research on news coverage of corruption.

While scholars have reviewed these news values in different ways over the years, the consensus remains that news values are a benchmark by which media practitioners decide that a story is worth disseminating. Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple, who have expressed reservations about how the term “news values” is applied by researchers, linked discourse analysis and news values to advance an approach called discursive news values analysis (DNVA). In the process, they identified “values that make the story newsworthy” (2012, p.42): negativity, timeliness, proximity, prominence, consonance, impact, novelty, superlativeness, and personalisation. The researcher was guided by these values and those proposed by Harcup and O'Neill (2016, p.13).

The justification and relevance of these values to the current research was established in Chapter Two.¹⁴³

Articles about the scandal were compiled by the researcher from each newspaper’s online archives. The period of the coverage for the Onnoghen scandal was from January 1 to May 28, 2019. A total of 1,105 articles were identified and subsequently screened. The final number of articles identified for the study was 225 from *The Punch*, 157 from *The Nation*, 71 from *Daily Trust*, 83 from *Vanguard*, 196 from *ThisDay*, and 98 from *Premium Times*. Thus, the total number of articles was 830.

6.3 Table 8: Identified patterns of newsworthiness in the Onnoghen scandal

News values	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>ThisDay</i>	<i>Premium Times</i>	Total
Prominence	51	32	18	27	51	31	210
Institutionality	49	32	16	26	49	19	191
Negativity/positivity	55	38	10	11	44	23	170
Drama/conflict	27	24	12	14	24	11	112
Timeliness	12	8	10	6	12	5	53
Consonance	15	16	2	4	5	1	43
Impact	4	2	0	2	4	3	15

Table 8 highlights the main news values that influenced coverage of news about the Onnoghen scandal: prominence, institutionality, negativity/positivity, and drama/conflict. In addition, the news values of timeliness, consonance, and impact were also present in a considerable number of articles. Some news values were excluded from the above table due to the negligible number of occurrences: superlatives, exclusiveness, elite nations, social media, surprise, and audio-visuals.

¹⁴³ See Sub-section 2.3.3, Chapter 2, p.89

6.3.1 Prominence

Onnoghen's high-ranking position differentiated him from commoners. Thus, his arrest was newsworthy. His title and professional roles were mentioned and significant. The mention of the name "Buhari" in the news reports is because of the president's role in the case. Although the focus of the corruption case was an influential figure, the name of the accused, "Onnoghen," assumed a life of its own in that it was given an attributive label in press coverage. The news value of prominence was not limited to Onnoghen; it also referred to powerful individuals such as former presidents and state governors, politicians, and their associates who alluded to or commented on the corruption case and took a position on the matter. These individuals included Atiku Abubakar a former vice-president who represented the main opposition party, the PDP, in the 2019 presidential elections and weighed in on the Onnoghen case.

6.3.2 Institutionalality

Under this news value, the focus is on the defence of an institution or institutional values, specifically the judiciary. In related news stories, institutions took a common position on the prosecution of Onnoghen. They ranged from members of the NBA, the Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SANs), political parties (especially the PDP), the National Assembly, the media (as evidenced by editorials), civil society bodies, ethnic groups, pressure groups, and religious groups.

6.3.3 Negativity/positivity

Although news stories that are adjudged as "bad" are usually considered as a criterion for making it into the news of the day, in terms of corruption news stories, it can be likened to a "doubled-edged" sword that possesses an inherent element of "we" versus "them" or "criticism" versus "approbation," which cuts both ways. In the Onnoghen case, negativity was viewed in light of, how could government prosecute a chief justice of Nigeria? Why should the

executive branch attempt to humiliate the judicial arm without recourse to the constitutionally required two-thirds majority in the National Assembly? Why was it now, so close to the elections? Thus, negativity was associated with illegality, such as threats to democracy or a plot to rig the elections in favour of the incumbent. This applied to the persecution of Onnoghen as a minority from the south who became CJN 30 years after the last southerner occupied the post.

Conversely, as a news value, positivity was seen in terms of the federal government's fulfilment of its promise to fight corruption, demonstrating that there was no sacred cow in the war against corruption. It also indicated that no one was above the law that the system was working, as well as the inducing of moral outrage of how could a chief justice of Nigeria forget to declare his assets in accordance with the requirements of the law?

The foregoing suggests that the news values of negativity/positivity not only reinforced a sense of belonging that potential readers likely brought to the news but also provided a somewhat competitive framework for structuring news about corruption. This framing could serve to attract more readers to a particular newspaper, increasing its sales. Martin Conboy recognised the place of such value in news content, writing that it must be organised according to what the "national readership is willing to recognise as belonging to its own narratives and traditions of nation" (Conboy, 2006, p.47).

6.3.4 Drama and Conflict

This news value was related to the detailed descriptions of proceedings at the corruption trial. Journalists employed narrative facts to reflect tensions or power relations inherent to the scandal; this was often heralded as breaking news. Drama and conflict were not limited to the actions of security agencies as they related to Onnoghen, protests, disagreements, and threats by political activists on the issue. For example, exchanges between the chairman of the CCT

and Onnoghen’s counsel were also prominently featured when the former accused the latter of engaging in tactics to delay the trial.¹⁴⁴ It is important to note that, during the data analysis, the news values of drama and conflict and negativity/positivity appeared to interact with each other.

6.3.5 Timeliness

This news value concerns temporal aspects of the case, such as updates on court dates, arraignments, and adjournments.

6.3.6 Consonance

This news value was informed by narratives on the Onnoghen scandal that aligned with the beliefs or opinions of individuals and political groups relevant to the issue. For example, on January 12, 2019, *The Punch* published an article with the headline: “Presidency has no hand in petition against Onnoghen – Aghanya.”¹⁴⁵ In it, a source (the case petitioner) attempts to dispel insinuations that the petition against Onnoghen was sponsored by Buhari.

6.3.7 Impact

Lawyers in some states in Nigeria boycotted all courts over Onnoghen’s trial. This would have impacted ongoing litigation at various levels and in various courts. This generated news headlines such as “NBA strike stalls judicial activities at Apo High Court” (*ThisDay*; January 29, 2019).

¹⁴⁴ See Nnochiri, I. (2019) Breaking: CCT Chairman, Onnoghen’s lawyer exchange hot words over trial. Vanguard 4 February 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/breaking-cct-chairman-onnoghens-lawyer-exchange-hot-words-over-trial/>

¹⁴⁵ Chiedozie, I. (2019) ‘Presidency has no hand in petition against Onnoghen- Aghanya’ *The Punch*, 12 January 2019. Retrieved from: <https://punchng.com/presidency-has-no-hand-in-petition-against-onnoghen-aghanya/>

6.3.8 Superlatives

The newsworthiness surrounding the use of superlatives in coverage of the scandal concern the intensification of the corruption trial’s “conflict” aspect. Thus, it was not uncommon to find news stories about the number of lawyers and the pedigree of senior lawyers who accompanied or defended Onnoghen at the CCT trial. For example, a headline from an article published on January 22, 2019 in *ThisDay* read, “Over 20 Senior Advocates, More than 100 Lawyers at CCT in Solidarity with Onnoghen.”¹⁴⁶ Similarly, it was not uncommon to find news reports on the number of youths who supported the government’s decision to prosecute Onnoghen.

6.3.9 Exclusiveness

Harcup and O’Neill (2016, p.13) identified exclusivity as a news value in stories which were “generated by, or available first to, the news organisation as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on.” Among the six newspapers analysed for the study, exclusivity only appeared in the *Premium Times*’ reporting on the scandal. For example, the online newspaper cited a document in which Onnoghen admitted that he “forgot to update his asset declaration, after the expiration of his 2005 declaration.”¹⁴⁷

6.3.10 Elite nations

Another news value identified in coverage of the scandal was elite nations. This was reflected in news about other nations’ which have primordial and perennial relationship with Nigeria—in this case, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the EU.

¹⁴⁶ Enumah, A. (2019) ‘Over 20 Senior Advocates, more than 100 lawyers at CCT in solidarity with Onnoghen’ *ThisDay* 22 January 2019. Retrieved from: thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/01/22/over-20-senior-advocates-more-than-100-lawyers-at-cct-in-solidarity-with-onnoghen/

¹⁴⁷ Okakwu, E. (2019) Exclusive: What CJN Onnoghen told CCB over asset declaration. *Premium Times*, 12 January 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/305421-exclusive-what-cjn-onnoghen-told-ccb-over-asset-declaration.html>

6.3.11 Social media

This news value was derived from the opinions of Nigerians on social media, particularly Twitter. For example, a Punch report published on January 12, 2019 featured the headline “Twitter users react to arraignment of CJN Onnoghen.”¹⁴⁸

6.3.12 Surprise

As a news value, surprise was reflected in Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo’s disclosure that President Buhari was unaware of Onnoghen’s ongoing prosecution, as pointed out in the analysis of different newspapers analysed later in this Chapter.

6.3.13 Audio-visuals

This news value was evident from the use of photographs, and videos that accompanied coverage of the scandal on the newspapers’ websites.

6.4 Patterns in coverage of the false declaration of assets case

The current section reveals patterns in the coverage of the corruption case involving Onnoghen and explains the framing adopted by each newspaper based on news values.

6.4.1 *ThisDay*

ThisDay focused on Onnoghen’s duties in his capacity as CJN. One of the CJN’s functions is to swear in other judges. In the early days of the scandal, *ThisDay* portrayed Onnoghen as an underdog who should not surrender to the blackmail¹⁴⁹ of the federal government. By portraying Onnoghen as the first CJN to be prosecuted for corruption in Nigeria, the newspaper would seem to be inciting its readership to stage an uprising against the Nigerian government by comparing the case to a similar one from Pakistan; under former president Pervez

¹⁴⁸ ‘Twitter users react to arraignment of CJN Onnoghen’ *The Punch*, January 12, 2019. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/twitter-users-react-to-arraignment-of-cjn-onnoghen/>

¹⁴⁹ Soniyi, T. (2019) ‘How not to remove a chief justice of Nigeria’ *ThisDay* 13 January 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/01/13/how-not-to-remove-a-chief-justice-of-nigeria/>

Musharraf, the country's chief judge (CJ) had been unceremoniously sacked. According to a news report by *ThisDay*, the incident sparked outrage:

Pakistani lawyers and others poured into the streets, setting off an unprecedented outburst of frustration that signalled the most serious challenge that General Musharraf had to deal with. The CJ was eventually reinstated. The protests weakened his presidency eventually leading to his resignation to avoid impeachment in 2008.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, *ThisDay* employed the witch-hunt frame to explain Onnoghen's trial.¹⁵¹ In the process, it reinforced the interpretation offered by a prominent lawyer¹⁵² who was sympathetic to the main opposition party and was quoted in a *Vanguard* article during the same period. Thus, *ThisDay* attributed the scandal not to the infractions allegedly committed by Onnoghen but rather the federal government. Again, the implicit interpretation deduced here is the appeal to ethicised political divisions in which a Muslim northerner cannot be trusted to govern the nation effectively.

In terms of institutionality, which was the second-most salient news value in the scandal, *ThisDay* frequently cited institutions that were highly critical of the government's decision to prosecute Onnoghen. These included the NBA, which called for a boycott of the national courts by its members and threatened to sanction the prosecutor at the CCT for professional misconduct for accepting the brief;¹⁵³ the National Assembly, which was led by members of the main opposition party; pro-ethnic groups such as the South South Governors Forum;¹⁵⁴ and

¹⁵⁰ See 'Nation Rises to Condemn Planned Arraignment of Chief Justice' *ThisDay*, 13 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/01/13/nation-rises-to-condemn-planned-arraignment-of-chief-justice/>

¹⁵¹ See 'The Questionable Trial of the CJN', *ThisDay* 15 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/01/15/the-questionable-trial-of-the-cjn/>

¹⁵² See 'FG's charges against CJN mere political witchhunt, says Ozekhome', *Vanguard* 12 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/01/fgs-charges-against-cjn-mere-political-witchhunt-says-ozekhome/>

¹⁵³ This was later denied by the NBA. See 'Onnoghen's trial: Tension as NBA queries prosecuting SAN, may impose sanctions', *The Nation*, 10 March 2019 retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/onnoghens-trial-tension-as-nba-queries-prosecuting-san-may-impose-sanctions/>

¹⁵⁴ Onnoghen hails from the South; it is also the stronghold of the main opposition party.

socio-ethnic groups such as the Ohaneze Ndigbo;¹⁵⁵ the main opposition party, the PDP; its allies in the Coalition of United Political Parties (CUPP); and religious groups.¹⁵⁶

Reporting on the Onnoghen case frequently centred around the frames of “witch-hunt” and “democracy/rule of law.” Institutions questioned the speed with which the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) prosecuted the allegations against Onnoghen. It was posited that precedence of statute on the case makes it objectionable. Also, the president’s reliance on an ex parte motion by the CCT to suspend Onnoghen from office instead of resorting to a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly or referring the matter to the NJC,¹⁵⁷ where Onnoghen was chairman was ill-advised. Thus, *ThisDay* focused on the negativity¹⁵⁸ surrounding Buhari and his government; at the same time, it positively portrayed critics of the government.¹⁵⁹

There was consonance of views,¹⁶⁰ which was reflected in some political actors’ belief that, by prosecuting Onnoghen, the government was attempting to rig the 2019 general elections in favour of the incumbent president. This problem was brought to the attention of elite nations—namely, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the EU—as requiring an urgent action.

6.4.2 *The Nation*

From the beginning of the scandal, media reports by *The Nation* tended to suggest intentional bad behaviour on the part of Onnoghen. For instance, the lead of an article read as follows:

¹⁵⁵ The Ohaneze Ndigbo is the apex socio-cultural ethnic group of South East. The main opposition party is also entrenched in this region.

¹⁵⁶ Such groups include Catholic Action Nigeria.

¹⁵⁷ The NJC is also headed by the CJN.

¹⁵⁸ The main opposition party claims that Buhari is a despot and that his government is a dictatorship.

¹⁵⁹ When a court prevented the federal government from proceeding with the Onnoghen’s trial, it was described as a victory for democracy.

¹⁶⁰ Onnoghen: Global Concerns Mount, Fears Heighten over Free, Fair Election, *ThisDay* 27 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/01/27/onnoghen-global-concerns-mount-fears-heighten-over-free-fair-election/>

Barring a late minute change, the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN), Justice Walter Nkanu Onnoghen has a date in court in Abuja tomorrow for alleged failure to declare some of his assets, including about \$3million.¹⁶¹

The newspaper also maintained the equivalent standard¹⁶² in references to both the law court and the CCT. It was also quick to link Onnoghen's previous rulings on the status of the CCT as a competent law court, as it acknowledged the CCT's powers¹⁶³ as enshrined in the Constitution of Nigeria.

Relying on anonymous sources, *The Nation* reported that Onnoghen's "salary account laid untouched in the bank for 18 months at a stretch."¹⁶⁴ This contrasted with an article published in *Daily Trust*, which stated that the funds were from estacodes paid to Onnoghen.¹⁶⁵ *The Nation* further reported the results of a poll on its website that asked readers whether the federal government was right to arraign Onnoghen before the CCT. The poll gave respondents three answer options: "Yes," "No," or "I don't know." The results revealed that 66% of participants supported the Nigerian government decision to prosecute the CJN, while 31% opposed his suspension.¹⁶⁶

The frame of corruption in *The Nation* was strengthened by the fact that the newspaper published details about the seized accounts belonging to Onnoghen¹⁶⁷ and legal statutes relevant to the matter even before the case was presented to the CCT. While the newspaper

¹⁶¹ FG files charges against CJN over \$3m in five accounts. *The Nation*, 13 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/fg-files-charges-cjn-3m-five-accounts/>

¹⁶² The impression created by the NBA and others sympathetic to Onnoghen is that the CCT was inferior to a law court and therefore not worthy of trying the CJN.

¹⁶³ How Onnoghen's judgements affirmed CCT's powers. *The Nation* 16 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/onnoghens-judgments-affirmed-ccts-powers/>

¹⁶⁴ \$3m probe: Fresh anxiety as detectives screen CJN's account, *The Nation*, 20 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/3m-probe-fresh-anxiety-detectives-screen-cjns-account//>

¹⁶⁵ Azu, J. (2019) CCT: None-declaration of asset a mistake, funds are from my estacodes- CJN Onnoghen. 12 January 2019, *Daily Trust*. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/cct-non-declaration-of-asset-a-mistake-funds-are-from-my-estacodes-cjn-onnoghen.html>

¹⁶⁶ See Nigerians back Buhari on suspension of CJN. *The Nation*, 8 February 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/nigerians-back-buhari-on-suspension-of-cjn/>

¹⁶⁷ More cash found in CJN Onnoghen's accounts, *The Nation*, 23 January 2019, Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/cash-found-cjn-onnoghens-accounts/>

frequently focused on the negativity surrounding Onnoghen, it tried to shield Buhari from the travails of the CJN by quoting Vice-President Osinbajo, who said that Buhari was unaware that Onnoghen had been arraigned before the CCT for failing to declare his assets:

[Buhari] has said categorically, “don’t interfere with what the institutions are doing.” Sometimes, it has consequences like we have today. My take is that I’d rather not have a situation where members of my profession are being tried for an offence. I don’t feel good about it. As a matter of fact, I feel very sad about it, that it’s going on at all.¹⁶⁸

To strengthen the frame of corruption, *The Nation* published series of reports featuring prominent individuals and institutions who were sympathetic to the government. It created the impression that Onnoghen was being prosecuted at the CCT not as a judicial officer but as a public officer. Following Onnoghen’s resignation, the newspaper published a feature which extensively cited arguments made by prosecutors from the EFCC before the NJC:

The NJC reached the decision to suspend Onnoghen after reviewing damning evidence by EFCC against him, argued by two brilliant prosecuting counsel Ekene Iheanacho and Rotimi Oyedepo. They argued successfully that Onnoghen violated the Code of Conduct for judicial officers.¹⁶⁹

Thus, based on the CCT findings, Onnoghen was found guilty of the non-declaration of assets. The voices of prominent individuals and groups were used to establish the primary frame of morality, which was anchored on social prescriptions about how public officers should behave.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Other newspapers reported that Buhari was unaware of the CJN’s trial. Critics latched on to this fact to argue that the president was not in control of the government. *The Nation*, however, reported on this differently by presenting another frame: that the president allowed institutions to do their work without interference. See “I feel very sad, says Osinbajo on Onnoghen,” *The Nation*, 17 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonline.net/feel-sad-says-osinbajo-onnoghen/>

¹⁶⁹ See Onnoghen: The man, the judge, the end, *The Nation*, 6 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonline.net/onnoghen-the-man-the-judge-the-end-2/>. Also See Onnoghen resigns ahead of imminent sack. *The Nation*, 6 April 2019 retrieved from <https://thenationonline.net/onnoghen-resigns-ahead-of-imminent-sack/>

¹⁷⁰ See Onanuga, A. & Jibueze, J. (2019) Utomi, SERAP, lawyers preach integrity as Onnoghen is convicted. *The Nation* 19 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonline.net/utomi-serap-lawyers-preach-integrity-as-onnoghen-is-convicted/>. See also Onnoghen. in *The Nation*. 14 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonline.net/Onnoghen/>

The newspaper's coverage also reflected a consonance of views by demonstrating support for the government's anticorruption war, which it established through headlines such as "SAN quizzed over \$30,000 in CJN Onnoghen's account"¹⁷¹ and "Gbajabiamila opposes Senate over Onnoghen."¹⁷²

6.4.3. *The Punch*

In its reporting, *The Punch* presented a wide range of voices in coverage of the scandal. From the beginning of the scandal, the newspaper questioned the credibility of the individual behind the petition against the CJN. By establishing that he had been a former aide to Buhari prior to his presidency in 2015, *The Punch* suggested that Buhari was responsible for the situation. The newspaper immediately denounced the government's fight against corruption as "selective, partisan, and directionless."¹⁷³ Like *ThisDay*, *The Punch* likened the decision to suspend Onnoghen as a strategy¹⁷⁴ that Buhari had borrowed from Venezuela's Nicholas Maduro, who seized control of his country's highest court and appointed members of the ruling party to the bench in contravention of the Venezuelan constitution.

However, although *The Punch* focused on the negativity surrounding Buhari and his government (similar to *ThisDay*), it tempered this negativity by incorporating a wide range of sources in its coverage of the scandal, which led to more balanced reporting.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ "SAN quizzed over \$30,000 in CJN Onnoghen's account' The Nation, 8 February 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/san-quizzed-over-30000-in-cjn-onnoghens-account/>

¹⁷² "Gbajabiamila opposes Senate over Onnoghen' The Nation, 29 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/gbajabiamila-opposes-senate-onnoghen/>

¹⁷³ Onnoghen trial: Let NJC do its job, The Punch, 15 January 2019 retrieved from <https://punchng.com/onnoghen-trial-let-njc-do-its-job/>

¹⁷⁴ CJN's suspension: A dictator bares his fangs, The Punch, 26 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/cjns-suspension-a-dictator-bares-his-fangs/>

¹⁷⁵ Onnoghen's travails: Why I filed petition against CJN, says Buhari's ex-spokesman. The Punch, 13 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/onnoghens-travails-why-i-filed-petition-against-cjn-says-buharis-ex-spokesman/>

Similarly, in terms of institutionality, *The Punch* frequently cited institutions that were highly critical of the government's decision to prosecute Onnoghen. Supporters on either side of the conflict were provided with a platform to express their beliefs on the matter. For instance, in a counter frame that challenged the "rule of law/threat to democracy" frame, the chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC), Professor Itse Sagay, explained that Onnoghen's prosecution demonstrated that "nobody is above the law" in Nigeria.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, support for the anticorruption war was established through headlines such as "Onnoghen: Even Dangote¹⁷⁷ can't forget \$1m in his account, says El-Rufai."¹⁷⁸ Another article by *The Punch* acknowledged that many Nigerians identify with the president on the need to fight corruption but indicated that "they want the anti-corruption war to be prosecuted within the confines of the law and due process." It was argued that "since the trial of the CJN began two weeks ago, there are but only a few who have not faulted the process."¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, in terms of consonance, *The Punch* amplified its audiences' narratives of the scandal by publishing tweets, which variously suggested that the Onnoghen case was part of an Islamisation agenda on the part of the president, that Onnoghen's suspension should be ignored by the Supreme Court, that Onnoghen's suspension seemed suspicious due to its proximity to the general elections, that Buhari was challenging the status quo by "upsetting the cart of the bourgeois such as the chief justice of Nigeria," and that it was questionable whether the president had the power to suspend Onnoghen.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Akinkuotu, E. (2019) CJN Onnoghen's prosecution shows no one is above the law-Sagay. *The Punch*, 12 January 2019, retrieved from <https://punchng.com/cjns-prosecution-shows-no-one-is-above-the-law-sagay/>

¹⁷⁷ Aliko Dangote is a Nigerian businessman and Africa's richest man.

¹⁷⁸ 'Onnoghen: Even Dangote can't forget \$1m in his account, says El-Rufai' *The Punch*, 1 February 2019. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/onnoghen-even-dangote-cant-forget-1m-in-his-bank-account-says-el-rufai/>

¹⁷⁹ Ramon, O. (2019) Onnoghen: A season of unusual happenings. *The Punch*, 26 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/onnoghen-a-season-of-unusual-happenings/>

¹⁸⁰ Nigerians react to Onnoghen's suspension, swearing-in of acting CJN. *The Punch*, 25 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/nigerians-react-to-onnoghens-suspension-swearing-in-of-acting-cjn/>

6.4.4 *Vanguard*

Similar to *ThisDay* and *The Punch*, *Vanguard's* coverage of the scandal tended to suggest that the president was responsible for the problem. This was established through the views of institutions, particularly the NBA, the PDP, and other groups sympathetic to the CJN. They frequently expressed confidence in the NJC's ability to resolve the situation. In the wake of Onnoghen's suspension by the government, the Pan-Niger Delta Forum¹⁸¹ (PANDEF) called on the NBA to boycott the courts and demanded that the NJC sanction the acting CJN for allowing himself to be sworn in as Onnoghen's replacement.¹⁸² Similarly, the PDP presidential flagbearer, Atiku Abubakar, indicated that the suspension was motivated by Buhari's desperation "to get Onnoghen out of the way and (in order) to appoint an Acting CJN whom he views as pliant and who will be made to superintend over election petitions in case his well laid out rigging plan fails."¹⁸³ These are patterns that appeared throughout *Vanguard's* reporting.

Through the frames of witch-hunt and threat to democracy/rule of law, the newspaper suggested a solution to the situation by enjoining Buhari to restore Onnoghen as CJN, then allowing both Onnoghen and the initial acting CJN, Mohammed Tanko, to "honourably resign" and pave the way for a new CJN "who is not in any way sullied by the politics and morality of this issue."¹⁸⁴ In this manner, the newspaper canvassed a soft landing for Onnoghen to prevent the accused from being humiliated out of office. Furthermore, in *Vanguard's* reporting on the

¹⁸¹ PANDEF is a regional socio-cultural group that champions the interests of the South, where Onnoghen hails from.

¹⁸² Amaize, E. (2019) 'CJN Onnoghen: PANDEF raises 4 posers for Buhari' *Vanguard*, 27 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/01/cjn-onnoghen-pandef-raises-4-posers-for-buhari/>

¹⁸³ Yakubu, D. (2019) '...even if allegations against Onnoghen are true, CCB was wrong...Atiku' *Vanguard* 12 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/01/even-if-allegations-against-onnoghen-are-true-ccb-was-wrong-atiku/>

¹⁸⁴ Onnoghen: our democracy in danger, *Vanguard*, 29 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/01/onnoghen-our-democracy-in-danger/>

CCT trial, it usually emphasised how Onnoghen was affected by the issue. For example, the lead to one article read as follows:

With the Federal Government closing its case in the on-going trial of Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Walter Onnoghen, before the Code of Conduct Tribunal, CCT, where the prosecution failed to prove most of the allegation carried by the media against him, Onnoghen has opted to go for a no case submission.¹⁸⁵

However, *Vanguard's* stance perhaps unsurprising, as it aligned with its contributions to advancing the cause of the Niger Delta. Reports of the opinions of influential individuals and groups were employed to counter frames of corruption against Onnoghen in the media. For example, representative headlines included “Election rigging worse than stealing billions-Onaiyekan”¹⁸⁶ and “Buhari may not handover if defeated, Wike alleges, ...says trial of Onoghen targeted at N’Delta, judiciary.”¹⁸⁷

6.4.5. *Daily Trust*

Like other newspapers, *Daily Trust* also attributed responsibility for the scandal to the government; this stance was reinforced through the voices of influential individuals and groups. Following the suspension of Onnoghen, it used the frames of rule of law and morality to draw attention to the proximity of the elections and the gravity of the allegations levelled against Onnoghen, although it indicated that “morality cannot trump express provisions of the law.”¹⁸⁸

In addition to publishing Buhari’s speech on the suspension of Onnoghen as CJN, *Daily Trust* published a series of reports that supported the government’s commitment to fighting corruption. After Onnoghen’s conviction in the CCT trial, *Daily Trust* published details about

¹⁸⁵ CCT: Why I’ve no case to answer- Onnoghen. *Vanguard* 26 March 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/03/cct-why-ive-no-case-to-answer-onnoghen/>

¹⁸⁶ John Cardinal Onaiyekan is the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and a respected voice on national issues. See “Election rigging worse than stealing billions – Onaiyekan.” *Vanguard* 15 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/04/election-rigging-worse-than-stealing-billions-onaiyekan/>

¹⁸⁷ Yafugborhi, E. (2019) Buhari may not handover if defeated, Wike alleges...says trial of Onoghen targeted at N’Delta, judiciary’ *Vanguard*, 14 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/01/buhari-may-not-handover-if-defeated-wike-alleges/>

¹⁸⁸ CJN’s suspension is a tragedy, *Daily Trust* 27 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/cjns-suspension-is-a-tragedy.html>

what the former CJN would be required to forfeit to the government.¹⁸⁹ It also provided an outlet for sources who canvassed for Onnoghen's resignation on moral grounds¹⁹⁰ and members of the institution who expressed dissent about its position on the scandal.¹⁹¹

Daily Trust also published an interview with the chairman of the CCB, who was quoted as saying that the case against Onnoghen was "thoroughly investigated as required by law. We shouldn't have gone to court if we know we don't have a case."¹⁹² Deepening drama/conflict as a news value, the newspaper provided readers with an audio-visual clip of the CCT trial that showed one of Onnoghen's lawyers seizing a journalist's mobile phone following an altercation with the chairman of the CCT.¹⁹³

6.4.6 *Premium Times*

Premium Times was the first newspaper to exclusively report Onnoghen's claim that he had forgotten to declare some of his assets. In addition, it was the only one to report on the ex parte motion¹⁹⁴ that Buhari relied on to suspend Onnoghen as CJN. Like other newspapers, *Premium Times* attributed the blame for the scandal on Buhari, thereby reinforcing the frame of "threat to democracy" championed by prominent individuals and institutions. However, it was the only

¹⁸⁹ Oloyede, C. (2019) 'What Onnoghen will forfeit to FG' *Daily Trust*, 19 April 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/what-onnoghen-will-forfeit-in-5-accounts-to-fg.html>

¹⁹⁰ Opoola, L. (2019) Ex-Labour Party secretary urges Onnoghen to resign' *Daily Trust* 28 January 2019. Retrieved <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/ex-labour-party-secretary-urges-onnoghen-to-resign.html>; See also: Terzungwe, S. (2019) Presidential candidates back Buhari on CJN's suspension, *Daily Trust* 29 January 2019

¹⁹² Azu, J. & Muhammadu, H. (2019) No political motive in CJN Onnoghen's trial-CCB chairman. *Daily Trust*, 22 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/no-political-motive-in-cjn-onnoghens-trial-ccb-chairman.html>

¹⁹³ Awomolo takes reporter's mobile at Onnoghen trial, demands apology, *Daily Trust*, <https://www.facebook.com/dailytrust/posts/awomolo-takes-reporters-mobile-at-onnoghen-trial-demands-apologyhttpstcoslcobyof/10157335392085864/>

¹⁹⁴ Ogundipe, S. (2019) The court order Buhari relied on to suspend CJN Onnoghen, *Premium Times* 25 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/308014-the-court-order-buhari-relied-on-to-suspend-cjn-onnoghen-details.html>

newspaper to simultaneously attribute blame for the scandal to the NJC, which failed to act quickly in Onnoghen's case and thereby protect the integrity of the judiciary.¹⁹⁵

In its coverage, *Premium Times* provided diverse sources in its accounts, from the courts to prominent individuals and groups, thus highlighting the negativity/positivity associated with key actors in the scandal. In addition, it reported on the conflict between lawyers for the defence and the prosecution, which took on an ethnic and religious dimension when the counsel for the prosecution, Aliu Umar, was quoted as follows: "I am from the north and I am proud of it. I am a Muslim I am proud of it."¹⁹⁶

6.5 Discussion

This study used news values as criteria to uncover patterns in the coverage of the corruption case involving Onnoghen. The findings revealed that the selected newspapers predominantly reported on the scandal based on the news values of prominence (with regard to the political actors who were central to the scandal) and institutionality, which involved different institutions (including the media) that took a position on the scandal.

Of the six daily newspapers chosen for the study, five (*ThisDay*, *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Premium Times*, and the *Daily Trust*) used the frames of "witch-hunt" and "threat to democracy/rule of law" to assign blame for the scandal to Buhari and his government. The coverage of these newspapers did not focus on the corruption allegedly perpetrated by Onnoghen CJN; rather, it framed the scandal as an attack on the judiciary and rule of law. Thus, the government's attempt to bring Onnoghen to justice was viewed as endangering Nigeria's democracy.

¹⁹⁵ 'Editorial: Onnoghen: Time to halt Nigeria's slide to anarchy' *Premium Times*. 27 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/editorial/308212-editorial-onnoghen-time-to-halt-nigerias-slide-to-anarchy.html>

¹⁹⁶ See Okakwu, E. (2019) How 'God help Nigeria' resulted in war of words at Onnoghen's CCT trial'. *Premium Times*, 30 March 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/323109-how-god-help-nigeria-resulted-in-war-of-words-at-onnoghens-cct-trial.html>

There is a general belief among Nigerians that nearly every political office holder will be guilty of some sort of infraction or corruption that could be tried. This is often unlooked by the authorities, until when certain culpable persons antagonise, in some ways, the president or influential members of his government. Thus, the witch-hunt frame was used to portray Onnoghen as a victim of the federal government's blackmail.

As articulated by powerful institutions and their prominent members, reasons to oppose the government's fight against corruption in Onnoghen's case were as follows:

1. There is a need to defend the independence of the judiciary as a separate entity of government, which is essential to protect the rights of individuals and groups in society.
2. The CCB is not part of the mainstream judiciary and is at best an inferior court. Thus, it should not be relied upon to adjudicate a matter involving the CJN.
3. The government relied on a controversial *ex parte* motion to suspend the CJN from office.
4. There is established precedence on the matter.¹⁹⁷
5. The moral standing of the chairman of the CCT himself is questionable, as allegations of corruption have been levelled against him in the past.
6. The government observes a double standard in the fight against corruption, as it had yet to prosecute close associates of Buhari and members of the ruling party who had been accused of corruption.
7. Onnoghen's suspension was motivated by nepotism, as Buhari sought to displace a southerner in favour of a fellow northerner.

¹⁹⁷ The precedence relates to a corruption case involving a judge, Hyeladzira Nganjiwa, who was charged by the EFCC for receiving bribes from lawyers. However, the appeal court ruled that the antigraft agency lacked the authority to charge the indicted judge, stating that only the NJC was empowered under the Constitution of Nigeria to address the allegations levelled against the judge. The case has since been appealed by the EFCC. However, as it pertains to Onnoghen, the government's position is that the powers of the NJC are limited to the administrative misconduct of judicial officers

8. Similarly, Buhari sought to displace a Christian in favour of a fellow Muslim.
9. Speedy trial of Onnoghen in spite of the proximity of the case to the 2019 elections as Buhari's precursor against the postelection litigations.
10. The international community should be aware of the Buhari administration's actions and apply sanctions as required.

Based on institutionality as a news value, it was found that institutions and their influential members tended to rank the administrative and procedural authority of the NJC and its ability to exercise disciplinary control over errant members over the criminal prosecution of judicial officers. In the aftermath of the Onnoghen scandal, the NJC wrote to Buhari to express its gratitude for his acceptance of Onnoghen's "voluntary retirement," which it claimed, "was in the best interest of Nigeria."¹⁹⁸ This was widely documented by newspapers.

The Nation stood out among the six newspapers, as it fully incorporated and consistently reinforced the frame of "fighting corruption" as advanced by the government. It frequently published reports on the charges against Onnoghen; they were written in a manner that provoked outrage among readers, who demanded the CJN's resignation from office.¹⁹⁹ On this case of Onnoghen, the newspaper often promoted the opinions of Professor Itse Sagay, chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC). He was quoted as follows during the early days of the scandal:

It is said that Julius Caesar's wife must be above board. If I'm the Chief Justice, even a judge, and you bring such a charge against me, I will not contest jurisdiction. If I contest jurisdiction and win, you're still going to say: "But you did it." Rather, I'll

¹⁹⁸ Adesomoju A. (2019) NJC thanks Buhari for accepting Onnoghen's voluntary retirement, *The Punch*, 10 June 2019. Retrieved from

<https://punchng.com/njc-thanks-buhari-for-accepting-onnoghens-voluntary-retirement/>

¹⁹⁹ See "Open letter to Hon. Justice Onnoghen," *The Nation* 24 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/open-letter-hon-justice-onnoghen/> Also See "In the matter of Walter Onnoghen" *The Nation* 26 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/matter-walter-onnoghen/>

waive the issue of jurisdiction because my status is so high that I must have a clean image before the world, so that the institution I represent may not be tainted.²⁰⁰

The Nation also reinforced this position by stating that

you don't have to be an advocate of the rigorous leadership ethos of Julius Caesar, to realise that Caesar's wife must not only be above board, but she must also be seen to be so. If such is expected of Caesar's wife, with what stringent standards would you judge Caesar himself? Yet, an early and honourable resignation would have considerably reduced the damage.²⁰¹

It was also found that institutions and influential members engaged in the spread of disinformation or fake news on social media. Both Onnoghen and the EFCC were forced to debunk unsubstantiated claims disseminated as part of online discourse. For example, during the early days of the scandal, a prominent member of the main opposition party posted a Tweet saying that EFCC officials had surrounded Onnoghen's residence, which turned out to be false.²⁰²

Thus, the findings revealed that institutions and influential individuals actively attempted to shape the discourse on corruption. The media passed this on to society.

²⁰⁰ Nganjiwa case not applicable to Onnoghen says Sagay. *The Nation*, 13 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/nganjiwa-case-not-applicable-onnoghen-says-sagay/>

²⁰¹ 'Onnoghen' *The Nation*. 14 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/onnoghen/>

²⁰² See Ogundipe, O. (2019) EFCC invites Fani-Kayode, Odumakin over fake news on CJN Onnoghen. *Premium Times*, 16 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/306038-just-in-efcc-invites-fani-kayode-odumakin-over-fake-news-on-cjn-onnoghen.html> ; Nnochiri, I. (2019) 'Fake News: Court stops EFCC, DSS from arresting Fani-Kayode, Odumakin' *Vanguard*, 21 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/01/fake-news-court-stops-efcc-dss-from-arresting-fani-kayode-odumakin/> ; Adepegba, A. (2019) EFCC denies raiding Onnoghen's residence. *The Punch*, 16 January 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/efcc-denies-raiding-onnoghens-residence/>; Azu, J. (2019) 'My house not under EFCC siege-CJN Onnoghen' *Daily Trust*, 15 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/my-house-not-under-efcc-siege-cjn-onnoghen.html>

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.0 Case Study III: The 2016 budget scandal in the National Assembly

7.1 Background

The Nigerian National Assembly is one of the largest bicameral legislatures in the world. It comprises the Red Chamber, which is occupied by the 109-member Senate, and the Green Chamber, which is occupied by the 360 members of the House of Representatives. The 2016 budget was the first one presented by Muhammadu Buhari's government to the National Assembly.²⁰³ However, by January 2016, there were claims in the media that the budget was missing. In addition, the leadership of the Senate stated that the version that had been distributed to members of the legislative body differed from the version presented by the president.

Buhari quietly withdrew the budget, ostensibly to make adjustments due to the fall in global crude oil prices; it was later presented a second time. A series of controversies emerged in the following weeks when some cabinet ministers who had gone before the House to defend their budgets disavowed their respective ministries inflated budgetary allocations. After the passage of the budget by the National Assembly in March 2016, the president withheld his assent, noting that critical projects proposed by the executive branch had been removed and that new line items had been introduced into the budget by legislators.

In the media, the complexity of these issues gave rise to the phrase "budget padding," a concept deployed by the press to expose the corrupt practices of the legislature. This concept was intended to refer to the "insertions of figures into the budget or mutilations of the budget

²⁰³ The 2016 budget, which was called the "budget of change," was presented by Buhari to a joint session of the National Assembly on December 22, 2015.

See Adebayo, T. (2015) 'Buhari presents N6.08 trillion budget for 2016'. *Premium Times*, 22 December 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/195559-buhari-presents-n6-08trillion-budget-for-2016.html>

without the consent of the owner of the document (the president) or with intent to betray the initial objectives of the budget preparation” (Aguguom & Ehiogu, 2016, p.42). After a series of meetings with the principal officers of the National Assembly, Buhari eventually signed the budget into law in May 2016.

It is important to note that controversies and contentions surrounding budget alterations and passages have been a feature of Nigerian politics since the return of democratic governance in 1999. Instead, what made the 2016 budget distinct were the actions of a notable member of the lower house, AbdulMumin Jibrin, who had been previously removed from his position as chairman of the Appropriations Committee, which is widely regarded in Nigerian political circles as a prime committee in the National Assembly. While chairman of the committee, Jibrin had previously called the allegation that the National Assembly padded budgets in its bid to steal public funds “insulting.” He argued that the legislative body was constitutionally empowered to amend the budget proposals of government agencies as it deemed fit.

However, after his removal, Jibrin made a series of allegations against principal officers of the Green Chamber, claiming that the House speaker and other leaders (including himself as chairman of the Appropriations Committee) had padded the 2016 budget to the amount of 40 billion naira. While Jibrin invited law enforcement agencies to investigate the budget padding scandal, the House acted on the report of its Ethics and Privileges Committee by suspending Jibrin for 180 legislative days and barred him from holding any position in the House until the expiration of the Eighth National Assembly.

7.2. Scope of Analysis

Building on the findings from the last two chapters, the aim of this chapter is to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the news media framed corruption in the legislative arm of the government by focusing on the institutional process of the appropriation of national resources.

In total, the researcher analysed 671 articles compiled from the archives of the six selected newspapers chosen for the study. The following search terms were used: “budget padding” and “AbdulMumin Jibrin” or “Jibrin.” The search yielded 156 articles from *The Punch*, 139 articles from *The Nation*, 61 articles from *Daily Trust*, 124 articles from *Vanguard*, 83 articles from *ThisDay*, and 108 articles from *Premium Times*. The analysis covered a period of six months: July 1 to December 31, 2016. This corresponded to the peak of the budget padding scandal. As in the previous case study on the Dasuki arms deal scandal, the researcher coded articles on the budget padding scandal, which allowed frames to inductively emerge from the data.

7.3. Primary frame categories in coverage of the budget padding scandal

7.3.1. Corruption

The most prevalent frame in coverage of the budget padding scandal was corruption. After stepping down from his position, Jibrin issued a press statement accusing principal officers of the House of Representatives of attempting to pad the 2016 budget. He reported that he was being lured to insert 40 billion naira out of the total 100 billion naira allocated to the National Assembly, the execution of which will be supervised by each member. Through his rhetoric, Jibrin rallied Nigerians to fight anticorruption in the National Assembly:

The idea is to do a cleanup, flush out corruption and corrupt members so that in 2019, only corrupt free people who want to serve will come in. God Almighty knows I am not perfect but as I approach 40 years in September, I have always wondered what is that I can live and die for.²⁰⁴

Jibrin was the focus of immense press coverage among the six newspapers examined in this research due to his confrontation of the leadership of the House of Representatives. He also frequently announced his next actions on Twitter. Corruption frames were evident not only from the allegations that Jibrin levelled against the leadership of the House but also from

²⁰⁴ Krishi, M. (2016) ‘Budget Padding- House of Reps Crisis Deepens’ *Daily Trust*, 29 July 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/budget-padding-house-of-reps-crisis-deepens.html>

counter-frames of corruption allegations levelled against Jibrin by allies of the speaker of the House and his colleagues.

Thus, the eruption of the budget padding scandal was seen as a reflection of the National Assembly's transgressions and a confirmation of its guilt, which was frequently advanced by elites such as ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo, who continued to command tremendous influence on national issues. He had his own reservations against the National Assembly; according to his critics, it was because the legislative body had foiled his attempts to secure a third term in office. Corruption also turn out to be a blackmail of the government agencies where National Assembly members constituency projects were located. A scenario of blame game ensued between members of the National Assembly and the accounting officers of government agencies where the fund for constituency projects are disbursable.

Another dimension of the corruption frame was exemplified by the attempts of the elders of the ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), to internally resolve the crisis involving its members in the legislature, since the speaker was viewed as a "loyal party man."²⁰⁵ Coverage of the scandal that used a corruption frame explicitly supported the government's anticorruption campaign. Allegations of corruption were likely to provoke expressions of outrage from the public, as they were seen as negating the Buhari government's anticorruption war. The exposition of the corruption frame, as articulated by Jibrin, was used to expose this significant story of institutional corruption in Nigeria and for which purpose, Buhari was elected in 2015. For Jibrin to now expose corruption, he claimed that it was intended to demonstrate his loyalty to Buhari.

²⁰⁵ Odebode, N., Ameh, J. & Baiyewu, L. (2016) 'Budget padding: APC moves to save Dogara, meets Speaker, Jibrin' *The Punch*, 3 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/budget-padding-apc-moves-save-dogara-meets-speaker-jubrin/>

7.3.2 Defence/excuse

This frame was associated with justifications of the positions adopted by legislators who were sympathetic to the leadership of the House of Representatives during the scandal. The strength of this frame was based on an interpretation of the Nigerian constitution, which empowers the legislature to consider and approve the budget estimates exclusively prepared by the executive branch of the government. Thus, Jibrin's allegations were seen by his opponents in the National Assembly as mere blackmail against the House leadership. Jibrin was portrayed as a "desperate politician" whose actions were spurred by his removal as head of the Appropriations Committee. The defence/excuse frame demonstrated that no illegality had been committed by the legislature in adjusting the budget because it was conducted in the developmental interests of members' respective constituencies.

7.3.3 Morality/hypocrisy

Morality/hypocrisy is related to the defence/excuse frame. It was used by key actors in the scandal to consolidate their position on the issue. Morality/hypocrisy is more implicit than explicit. The focus here by the media is on questioning the motivation behind the prosecution of corruption. The media is also interested in unravelling the antecedents to a particular corrupt case. The press would also like to probe the source of the story in presenting the scandal. For example, Obasanjo described lawmakers as "rogues and armed robbers." In response, some longstanding members of the National Assembly were quick to recall that they rejected Obasanjo's attempt to influence them with a bribe of 50 million naira each to extend his tenure as president.²⁰⁶ Morality/hypocrisy was also used to question Jibrin's anticorruption bona fides, as some believed that he was the one to blame for padding the budget, which the president had hitherto declined to sign into law.

²⁰⁶ See Baiyewu, L. (2016) 'I rejected N50m bribe to support Obasanjo's third term bid-Na'Allah' *The Punch*, 27 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/rejected-n50m-bribe-support-obasanjos-third-term-bid-naallah/>

7.4 Patterns in coverage of the budget padding scandal

7.4.1 *Daily Trust*

In terms of corruption frames, coverage of the scandal reflected disagreements between Jibrin and the speaker of the House of Representatives and his allies. Both parties upbraided each other over corruption allegations and defended themselves against criticisms. This was a prevalent theme across the six newspapers. During the scandal, *Daily Trust* published a profile on Jibrin that highlighted the legislator as a successful businessman and a political strategist.²⁰⁷ This positive portrayal was perhaps motivated by ethnoreligious solidarity, since Jibrin hails from the northern part of Nigeria and is thus considered an interested party, primarily for his promotion of the Buhari government's anticorruption crusade. On the other hand, the speaker of the House, Yakubu Dogara, is a northern minority and a Christian.²⁰⁸

Thus, in *Daily Trust's* coverage of the scandal, legislators in the National Assembly were painted with negative stereotypes and blamed for the problem of budget padding. The newspaper's columnists saw budget padding as a "loot-sharing time" and a "way of life": "If the loot goes round and every robber keeps his end of the bargain, it will all 'digest' peacefully; otherwise, it will lead to 'constipation.'"²⁰⁹

Another dimension of the corruption frame in *Daily Trust* was the provision of an expansive platform to dissenting members²¹⁰ of the legislature who sought to change the status quo. These views appeared to undermine the positions of Dogara and his allies, who had chosen not to

²⁰⁷ See Krishi, M. (2016) 'Who's Rep Abdulmumin Jibrin?' *Daily Trust*, 1 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/whos-rep-abdulmumin-jibrin.html>

²⁰⁸ It is important to recall here that, the northern region has always been identified with Islam, the South East and South associated with Christianity, the South West with a nearly equal blend of both Muslims and Christians.

²⁰⁹ Olaye, W. (2016) "Anatomy of Sleaze," *Daily Trust* 8 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/anatomy-of-sleaze.html>

²¹⁰ In particular, were members belonging to intra-pressure groups of Integrity and the Transparency Groups.

resign from their positions in the wake of the scandal. One unidentified lawmaker said the following:

If no one will move for [Dogara's] impeachment, I will do that. I can't believe what they did. Are we not all equal? We were all elected by our people to come here and represent them. Nobody should play smart. For me, they are all failures, including Jibrin.²¹¹

This coverage could be seen as a balancing act by *Daily Trust* to provide its audiences with all sides of the story.

7.4.2 *The Punch*

As in *Daily Trust*, the predominant frame in *The Punch*'s coverage of the budget padding scandal was corruption. From July to September 2016, civil society actors such as members of the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) demanded accountability through probes. Moreover, calls for the resignation of Dogara and other principal officers of the House named in the scandal were published multiple times in *The Punch*. In its stories, the newspaper also emphasised that law enforcement agencies would solve the issue of budget padding. Columnists frequently attributed blame on the National Assembly. As one columnist indicated, "not only is the legislature not fighting corruption, but it has itself become a specimen of corruption to be fought."²¹² Words used in reference with the legislators and the National Assembly included "corrupt" and selfish representatives, The frame of corruption was reinforced in the opening paragraph of an editorial published by *The Punch*:

There can hardly be any reasonable assertion that some serious fight against corruption is taking place in the country without evidence of the searchlight beaming on the activities of the National Assembly members.²¹³

²¹¹ Krishi, M. (2016) "Budget Padding- House of Reps Crisis Deepens' *Daily Trust*, 29 July 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/budget-padding-house-of-reps-crisis-deepens.html>

²¹² Olukotun, A. (2016) "Buhari's lonely anti-corruption war' *The Punch*, 29 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/buharis-lonely-anti-corruption-war/>

²¹³ Budget Padding: A scandal meriting EFCC's probe. *The Punch*, 21 September 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/budget-padding-scandal-meriting-efccs-probe/>

The newspaper portrayed Jibrin as an underdog when it stated that “the whistle-blower has become a victim” and that, following his suspension by the House, he would “be in the cold for 180 days.”²¹⁴ It aligned itself with Jibrin’s position when the latter asked the president to speak up on the matter, decrying the executive branch and law enforcement agencies’ “conspiracy of silence” on the scandal.

In examining the impact of the National Assembly since 2015, *The Punch* highlighted a diverse range of opinions on the scandal. At times, it focused on the economic downturn in Nigeria in relation to lawmakers’ emoluments, consistently portraying the legislative branch as the cause of the problem.²¹⁵ Furthermore, it emphasised the voices of influential actors in society who remained strident in their criticism of corruption among members of the legislature.²¹⁶

On the other hand, through the use of the defence/excuse and morality/hypocrisy frames, *The Punch* quoted sources who questioned the use of the term “budget padding”; these were usually Dogara’s allies. They preferred to frame the controversy as seeking to allocate funds for their respective constituency projects in the national budget which they deemed lawful. Therefore, rather than the term “budget padding,” these lawmakers preferred the term “inputs” or “insertions”:

I hate that word, padding. What did anybody pad? It makes some sense if you say they stole money. No money was stolen; you are saying that they attracted projects to their constituencies. Their people will even celebrate them for doing so as their representatives. The Jibrin, who is talking, put so many projects in his own constituency too. No member of the Appropriation Committee has begrudged him for doing so.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ ‘Travails of lawmaker Jibrin’ *The Punch*, 13 October 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/travails-lawmaker-jibrin/>

²¹⁵ Adeoye, G. (2016) ‘Eighth Assembly: Many controversies, little impact’ *The Punch* 30 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/eighth-assemblymany-controversies-little-impact/>

²¹⁶ See Adetayo, O. (2016) ‘Obasanjo: Old soldier never dies’ 30 July 2016; Akinloye, B. (2016) N’Assembly: Obasanjo as lawmaker’s nemesis’ *The Punch*, 31 July 2016.

²¹⁷ Ameh, J., Adetayo, O. & Baiyewu, L. (2016) ‘Budget padding justifies my criticism of N’ Assembly, says Obasanjo’ *The Punch*, 26 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/budget-padding-justifies-criticism-nassembly-says-obasanjo/>

Thus, the lawmakers blamed not only Jibrin but also the media for using the term “budget padding” to describe their actions.²¹⁸

7.4.3 *ThisDay*

In terms of the corruption frame, *ThisDay* emphasised the conflict between Jibrin and Dogara and his allies.²¹⁹ The newspaper observed Jibrin’s approach to the scandal, describing it as a “scorched earth policy.” It also highlighted Twitter disagreements between actors in the scandal by reinforcing the disagreements on the matter.²²⁰ After Jibrin went public with his allegations, Dogara’s side was perceived from a position of strength. The newspaper published the full details of the House’s allegations against Jibrin while he was chairman of the Appropriations Committee. *ThisDay* also used adjectives that humanised its portrayal of the budget padding scandal. For example, articles featured headlines such as “Abdulmumin Makes U-Turn, Demands Dogara’s Resignation” and “Abdulmumini: I Collected N650m in Five Years.”²²¹ In a country where 40% of the population live below the poverty line,²²² such reports were likely to elicit strong and negative reactions from members of the public. Quotations from sources who described Jibrin as “desperate” and “disrespectful” also appeared in the newspaper.

In a pull quote, *ThisDay* emphasised order above all as it advocated for dialogue between the main parties to resolve the issue. It mentioned the economic consequences of failing to pursue

²¹⁸ The Senate leader in the National Assembly stated that the scandal is a ‘mere media hype.’ See Adetayo, O. (2016) ‘Budget padding allegation, mere media hype- Ndume’ *The Punch*, 30 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/budget-padding-allegation-mere-media-hype-ndume/>

²¹⁹ See Oyedele, D. (2016) ‘House fires back at Abdulmumin’ *ThisDay* 27 July 2016, Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/07/27/house-fires-back-at-abdulmumin/>

²²⁰ See; Oyedele, D. (2016) ‘Budget Scandal: Lawmakers Spar on Twitter’ *ThisDay*, 6 September 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/09/06/budget-scandal-lawmakers-spar-on-twitter/>

²²¹ See Oyedele, D. (2016) ‘Abdulmumin Makes U-Turn, Demands Dogara’s Resignation’ *This Day*, 22 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/07/22/abdulmumin-makes-u-turn-demands-dogaras-resignation/>; Oyedele, D. (2016) ‘Abdulmumini: I collected N650m in Five Years’ *ThisDay* 28 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/08/28/abdulmuminii-collected-n650m-in-five-years/>

²²² In a report on poverty and inequality in Nigeria between September 2018 and October 2019, the National Bureau of Statistics indicated that 40% of Nigerians (82.9 million people) lived below its poverty line (based on a cut-off of 137,430 naira per year). See <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/>

dialogue, between the leadership and the accuser. The danger of non-resolution of the faceoff include the likelihood that Jibrin would resort to “self-preservation” measures in desperation after his suspension by the House. In addition, failing to resolve the situation would negatively affect the National Assembly’s image, which could discourage investments in Nigeria and undermine democracy.²²³ The paper also posited that non-resolution of the crisis will encourage other media sources to promote views akin to those of the accuser, thus escalating the bad image of Nigeria on corruption.

The position of strength in favour of the National Assembly leadership was created with the defence/excuse frame following Dogara’s visit to the president on the matter. Just like in *The Punch*, the definition of “budget padding” remained controversial. The accuser calls it ‘padding’ while the leadership of the House of Representatives argue that the House was merely exercising its power of appropriation enshrined in the constitution. Dogara reportedly said the following:

For me, I studied law and I have been in the legislature and all this period, I have never heard of the word padding being an offence under any law, if I don’t know, you are the media. Research the law and let me know.²²⁴

Based on these remarks, Dogara appears to attribute responsibility for the budget padding scandal to the media. On the use of defence/excuse frames, *The Punch* frequently cited sources that described padding as a normal and legitimate process guaranteed under the constitution. It also ran a story about how the House’s internal conventions supported the lawmakers’ actions

²²³ See ‘The House and the Jibrin Affair’ ThisDay, 13 October 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/10/13/the-house-and-the-jibrin-affair/> Also see: ‘Budget Padding: NLC, Others Advocate Caution, Equality, Peace’ ThisDay 6 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/08/07/budget-padding-nlc-others-advocate-caution-equality-peace/>

²²⁴ Soniyi, T. & Oyedele, D. (2016) ‘Padding? What Does That Mean? Dogara Weighs in’ ThisDay 6 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/08/06/padding-what-does-that-mean-dogara-weighs-in/>

in the treatment of the 2016 budget.²²⁵ Instead of being portrayed as corrupt, the legislative members were described as making sacrifices for the country's progress.

7.4.4 *Premium Times*

Of the six newspapers explored in this case study, *Premium Times* produced exclusive coverage of the budget padding scandal. It published details of unedited documents which indicted Dogara and his allies. Corruption was the most predominant frame used in *Premium Times*. Attention centred on allegations of corruption articulated by Jibrin, which frequently appeared in the newspaper's reports on the scandal.

Premium Times held members of the legislature responsible for corruption and budget padding.²²⁶ Furthermore, it published a two-pronged investigative report which highlighted details of different schemes through which members of the legislative and executive branches of the government padded the budget.²²⁷ In the first part of the report, which was titled "How to 'pad' the Nigerian budget and be a billionaire," *Premium Times* outlined 11 steps to get rich quickly from the budget:

- Step 1. Get elected into the National Assembly – you can go to Senate or House of Representatives. It doesn't really matter.
- Step 2. Be a good friend of the Speaker or Senate President, and the respective budget chairpersons of appropriation committees. That is the legislative committee that vets the budget.

²²⁵ See Babatunde, O. (2016) 'Budget Padding a Ruse; House Standing Rules Support Actions of Lawmakers' ThisDay 6 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/08/06/budget-padding-a-ruse-house-standing-rules-support-actions-of-lawmakers/>

²²⁶ Ogundipe, S. (2016) 'Documents expose Nigerian lawmakers' massive budget fraud' *Premium Times*, 25 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/207473-documents-expose-nigerian-lawmakers-massive-budget-fraud.html>

²²⁷ See Emmanuel, O. & Akinwumi, R. (2016) 'How to 'pad' the Nigerian budget and be a billionaire' *Premium Times*, 27 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/features-and-interviews/207610-how-nigerian-senators-reps-pad-national-budgets-and-make-billions.html>; Emmanuel, O. & Akinwumi, R. (2016) 'How to pad the Nigerian budget and become a billionaire (Part 2)' *Premium Times*, 28 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/features-and-interviews/209435-pad-nigerian-budget-become-billionaire-part-2.html>

- Step 3. Think up some flimsy projects – say, boreholes to provide water for your poor constituents. It is called constituency project.
- Step 4. Look for a government agency or ministry that can smuggle that project into the budget for you and lobby the target minister or DG. Of course, the respective committee chairman in the National Assembly must know.
- Step 5. Set up a company. Or get your spouse, brother, sister, or loyalist to register a company that can execute your chosen project.
- Step 6. Plead with the chairman of the Appropriation Committee to edit the budget and include your project under the agency or ministry that you lobbied. Because budget figures are usually large, this may seem like adding a cup of water to River Niger. If appropriation chairman refuses to play, lobby the Speaker or the Senate President.
- Step 7. Say “aye” on the day the budget is put up for debate. (This step is not very critical. You can decide not to show up and it will be bundled with the entire budget and passed. Almost all of your colleagues are in it.)
- Step 8. After the Ministry of Finance has released funds, approach the head of the agency to award the contract for your project to the company in #5. Most heads may require their share upfront. You can’t trust anyone in this business!
- Step 9. The company gets cash deposit from ministry or agency. It is withdrawn and handed to you. You can share with anyone that helped the process, but you’ll sure retain the bulk of it.
- Step 10. Sink a borehole in your community with a very tiny fraction of the money and call national TVs to come cover the “commissioning of your constituency projects.”
- Step 11. Plan for next year.²²⁸

The second part of the investigative report described a different method of budget padding. It was complemented with infographics that showed the network of corruption between the legislature and the executive.²²⁹ Like *The Punch*, *Premium Times* emphasised the voices of prominent individuals who were critical of corruption among members of the National

²²⁸ See Emmanuel, O. & Akinwumi, R. (2016) ‘How to ‘pad’ the Nigerian budget and be a billionaire’ *Premium Times*, 27 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/features-and-interviews/207610-how-nigerian-senators-reps-pad-national-budgets-and-make-billions.html>

²²⁹ Emmanuel, O. & Akinwumi, R. (2016) ‘How to pad the Nigerian budget and become a billionaire (Part 2)’ *Premium Times*, 28 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/features-and-interviews/209435-pad-nigerian-budget-become-billionaire-part-2.html>

Assembly. The controversy over the definition of padding was also a matter of contention in the newspaper. It reported on the interview conducted by a national television outlet with a lawmaker on the topic.²³⁰ Using the morality/hypocrisy frame, the newspaper described the actions of National Assembly members who sought to cultivate a smooth working relationship with the executive branch as “eye service.”²³¹

7.4.5 Vanguard

Corruption was the most pervasive frame in *Vanguard*'s coverage of the budget padding scandal, as the newspaper often emphasised Jibrin's alleged transgressions. Using the defence/excuse frame, it cited sources that described padding as a standard legislative procedure that was acceptable under the constitution. *Vanguard* highlighted the voices of people who supported the position of Dogara and his allies and the difficulties associated with the whistleblower, Jibrin. Related stories included headlines such as “Budget Padding: EFCC grills Jibrin for seven hours” and “UK crime agency beams searchlight on Jibrin's alleged 5 foreign accounts.”

7.4.6 The Nation

Through anonymous sources, individuals accused of corruption were frequently framed as though they were already guilty.²³² Jibrin's revelations about the misdeeds of lawmakers were emphasised. *The Nation* usually turned to notable individuals and civil society organisations (who often were critical of the legislators) to obtain information about budget padding. It was

²³⁰Onyeji, E. (2016) Interview: How we pad budgets every year- Reps Lawal Gumau' Premium Times, 1 August 2016, Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/207899-interview-pad-budgets-every-year-reps-lawal-gumau.html>

²³¹ Adebayo, T. (2016) National Assembly launches 'eye service' prayer project to appease Buhari. Premium Times, 30 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/207810-national-assembly-launches-eye-service-prayer-project-appease-buhari.html>

²³² 'Omisore under pressure over N60bn 'strange' vote' The Nation, 12 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/omisore-pressure-n60b-strange-vote/>. See also: 'Integrity on trial in the Green Chamber' The Nation, 6 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/integrity-trial-green-chamber/>

also notable in its use of informal channels, such as anonymous sources, in its reporting of corruption allegations.²³³ *The Nation* captured all of Jibrin’s comments, from his petition on budget padding to law enforcement agencies to claims that lawmakers received \$25,000 each in bribes²³⁴ to pass a vote of confidence on Dogara. In the early days of the conflict, there was uncertainty about whether Jibrin had resigned or been fired from office. While *The Nation* agreed with Jibrin’s claim that he had resigned, other newspapers, including *Vanguard*, *Premium Times*, and *The Punch*, used the term “sacked.” According to *Daily Trust*, he had been “replaced.” Thus, *The Nation* attributed blame for the budget padding scandal to members of the National Assembly.

The newspaper reinforced the morality/hypocrisy frame by publishing comments from readers, such as “those who come to equity must do so with squeaky clean hands.”²³⁵ Another dimension of this frame is that it was used to amplify the voices of lawmakers who challenged the status quo by seeking equality in the distribution of the commonwealth. For example, one lawmaker was quoted in *The Nation* as follows:

Which member will be happy to tell her/his constituents (for example) that a colleague got over a billion-naira worth of constituency projects while you can only attract projects worth few scores of millions of naira to your constituency.²³⁶

Similarly, the newspaper questioned the appropriateness of Jibrin’s 180-day suspension, stating that it effectively denied his “constituency any representations” while it lasted.²³⁷

²³³ Reps step up dirty fight over Budget 2016 scandal. *The Nation*, 25 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/rep-step-dirty-fight-budget-2016-scandal/>

²³⁴ Padding: Lawmakers received \$25, 000 each for vote of confidence-Jibrin, *The Nation*, 3 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/padding-lawmakers-received-25000-vote-confidence-jibrin/>

²³⁵ Onyemere, S. (2016) Jibrin vs Dogara: A case of sour grapes? *The Nation*, 29 July 2016. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/jibrin-vs-dogara-case-sour-grapes/>

²³⁶ Rep faults colleagues’ defence of budget padding’ *The Nation*, 11 August 2016. Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/rep-faults-colleagues-defence-budget-padding/>

²³⁷ ‘Jibrin’s suspension’ *The Nation*, 6 October 2016. <https://thenationonlineng.net/jibrins-suspension/>

It is clear from the analysis on corruption in the legislature that all the media outlets appeared to oppose corruption in this case in spite of differences in the religion of the whistleblower, Jibrin, who is a Muslim from the North West, and the speaker of the House, Dogara, who is a Christian from the North East. The differences on the basis of ethnicity and religion, cannot come to play here. This scenario presupposes that the entire country is represented by the National Assembly. Thus, all the newspapers opposed corruption in this case. However, they differed in terms of the extent of their support or opposition to the exercise compared to the other two case studies covered in Chapters Five and Six. The common factors are the mundane differences on the basis of ethnicity, religion and political affiliation as evident from the other two case studies which divided the media along those lines.

7.5. Summary

The last three chapters examined patterns in the media coverage of corruption at the six daily newspapers chosen for the study. Next, Chapters Eight and Nine focus on interpreting narratives about the anticorruption crusade and examining the circumstances under which the corruption stories were produced. This two chapters of the study which includes interviews with journalism professionals, presents a critical mass of this research. Moreover, the efforts of these journalists are assessed by journalism scholars in Nigeria, whose contributions to this research are intended to serve as a bridge, linking the gown with the town.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8.0. Central argument on journalistic coverage of the anticorruption crusade

As evidenced by the three case studies presented in this thesis, the news discourse surrounding the anticorruption crusade demonstrated some striking and interconnected features of Nigerian political culture. These are examined under the rubrics of religion, ethnicity, and personalism. However, before proceeding, it is important to note that the prebendal nature of the Nigerian political system lies at the core of these issues (Joseph, 1987). In Nigeria, political office holders are expected to benefit not only themselves but also their immediate constituencies, which had hitherto provided them with political support.

For example, Muhammadu Buhari stated the following in response to questions about governance at an international forum around two months after his inauguration as Nigeria's president:

I hope you have a copy of the election results. The constituents, for example that gave me 97% of the votes cannot, in all honesty, be treated on some issues as equal with constituencies that gave me 5%. I think these are political realities.²³⁸

Although his media handlers later argued that this statement was taken out of context in an attempt to counter the criticisms that followed Buhari's speech, the framework of prebendalism was already established. This speaks to Buhari's concept of political hegemony. The controversy generated on the above quotation demonstrates that people use political affiliation, religion, and ethnic groups to assert dominance over each other.

²³⁸ See 'Buhari's Statement at The US Institute of Peace That Made Everyone Cringe' *Sahara Reporters*, 25 July 2015. Retrieved from <http://saharareporters.com/2015/07/25/buhari%E2%80%99s-statement-us-institute-peace-made-everyone-crige-0>

8.1. Religion and the politics of the anticorruption discourse

To understand the role of religion in narratives on the war against corruption, Nigeria's colonial past must be examined to explain the ongoing tensions between Muslims and Christians. The first governor general and Protectorate of the Colony now called Nigeria, Lord Frederick Lugard, was sympathetic to the Muslim north and “never took to the advanced and critical citizens of Lagos and its Yoruba surroundings” (Bourne 2015, p.4), which corresponds to the southern part of Nigeria—where most first-generation, Western-educated nationalists such as Herbert Macaulay came from.

After the British merged the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, the appointment of Western-educated Christian southerners by colonial administrators to fill gaps in professional manpower required to address emerging bureaucracy and development in the predominantly Muslim north soon bred resentment²³⁹ among northerners (Vaughan, 2016, p.90).

Compared to the Southern Protectorate, the north, had limited exposure to Western forms of education spread by Christian missionaries. In fact, the northern region already had flourishing Islamic-Arabic literacy that resulted from the jihadist and reformist activities of Uthman ibn Fodio²⁴⁰ in the 18th century (Abubakre, 2004). Perhaps due to the exigencies of the indirect governance employed by colonial administrators in the Northern Protectorate, the colonialists worked with Hausa-

²³⁹ Fuller context on this can be found in Sub-section 1.3.1.1, Chapter One, p. 24.

²⁴⁰ The Sokoto Jihad (1804–1808) under Uthman ibn Fodio, a Fulani Muslim preacher resulted in the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate, which mainly covered northern parts of modern-day Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Niger. It was conquered by the British and the Germans in 1903; subsequently, the British designated its part as the Northern Nigeria Protectorate. Following the defeat of the Germans in World War I, the Cameroonian territory, under the League of Nations, was given to Britain and France. The latter had approximately three quarters of the territory, while the former had one quarter.

Fulani leaders to check the spread of Christianity in the north by rejecting “not only Christian proselytising but also its sociocultural underpinnings of Western education” (Vaughan 2016, p.90).

After independence, military coups and civil war deepened existing tensions between Christians and Muslims, which have continued to affect the political environment and culture of Nigeria. The structural adjustment programme era of the late 1980s greatly impacted the socio-economic life of the people. It was a period of economic deterioration that resulted in the gradual impoverishment of many Nigerians. It also marked the flourishing of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Ghana,²⁴¹ which fostered a common purpose that was both spiritual and material in nature and transcended local, ethnic, regional, and class divides (Marshall-Fratani, 1998). Pentecostalism became significant because of its prescriptive ability to connect with important themes of prosperity, miraculous breakthroughs, and success, which were strongly desired by members of the public (see also Larkin and Meyer, 2006, p.290).

At the time, Pentecostalism was noted for its demonisation of African traditional religious practices and even Islam (Marshall-Fratani,1998, Marshall, 2009). It also prompted the emergence of what Obadare (2016) calls “charismatic Islam,” in which Muslim adherents appropriated specific aspects of Christian evangelical practice, such as proselytization and organisational features.

²⁴¹ Ghana is significant of this discourse because, like Nigeria, it is an English-speaking country that was colonised by the British. Although they are separated by two francophone nations, Nigeria and Ghana more or less view their relationship as that of close neighbours.

However, Pentecostalism's influence on the Nigerian political landscape was well-entrenched by the country's return to democracy in 1999. At the time, a Christian president emerged and built a church within the seat of government in Aso Rock. According to Obadare (2006, p.672),

Having regular morning Christian prayers in Aso Rock, attended by many public office holders, was seen as deeply symbolic. After decades of northern Islamic rule, it was imperative to reconstruct the presidency and the presidential villa itself (both materially and symbolically) as a Christian bastion against both "Satanic" and invading "Jihadist" (Caliphate) forces.

It is important to note that there is a high level of religiosity among Nigerians. Large numbers of Nigerian Muslims and Christians participate every year in holy pilgrimages to Makkah and Madinah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or Jerusalem in the state of Israel and Palestine to fulfil their religious obligations. In addition to mosques, orthodox churches and Pentecostal mega churches with breath taking architectural features can be found across the country. Religious organisations, particularly Pentecostal institutions, have also significantly invested in other development areas, such as education and health. They provide infrastructural support and succour to the people, which successive governments have been unable to accomplish due to political corruption.

To a certain extent, religious leaders can fill this important gap in society. It enables them to assert and promote their ideas to huge congregations. In the process, they actively exercise power by moulding the perceptions of worshippers, not only for theological causes but also to intervene in the nation's politics, as politicians and other elites readily rely on religious leaders for prayers and other spiritual interventions to win elections and maintain their status in society. Through such activities, religious leaders have formed close relationships with political office

holders and reap tangible benefits from them, such as import waivers. Journalism in Nigeria is often shaped by the promotion and circulation of these influential religious leaders' views. This cordial relationship spills over to coverage of news, with bias shown towards one religion or another. While this is significant for our understanding of the manufacturing of consent, as advanced by Herman and Chomsky, Pentecostal leaders should be seen in this context as a strategic and important filter that can advance the agendas of the political class, as they also adopt the "language and imagery of the state" (Marshall-Fratani,1998, p.306). This enables them to participate in politics, invest in the media, and disseminate inspiring messages linked to popular urban culture. This context is relevant to Price's (1994, p.668) assertion that "the market for loyalties" must be "contrasted with the marketplace of ideas," which emphasises religion as an important component of the market for loyalties (Price, 2007, p.87).

Several Pentecostal mega churches have thriving investments within and outside of Nigeria through which funds are remitted to the parent institution. The churches also provide "social, cultural and spiritual capital" (Adogame, 2013, p.101) to Nigerians in the diaspora, who constitute the largest African migrant group in economically advanced nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and EU member states. A special report by Reuters even described mega churches as "a hidden pillar" of the Nigerian economy.²⁴²

One prominent Pentecostal leader is David Oyedepo, a pastor reputed for championing the prosperity gospel. As of 2013, Oyedepo's church, the Living Faith

²⁴² See 'Insight- Nigeria's 'megachurches': a hidden pillar of Africa's top economy' Reuters, 12 October 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-megachurches-insight-idUSKCN01104B20141012>

Church (also known as “Winners’ Chapel”), had “6000 branches in Nigeria, 700 branches in other African countries and 30 in Europe and North America” (Gifford, 2015). The church also boasts of one of the best and most expensive private universities in Nigeria.

In 2012, George Arbuthnott of the British newspaper *Daily Mail* wrote an investigative report that chronicled how Oyedepo used the church to exploit its members for commercial gain²⁴³ in England. According to the report, donations to Living Faith churches in the country doubled from £2.21 million to £4.37 million between 2006 and 2010. Approximately 73% of donations were funnelled into remittances to the parent church in Nigeria. David Garbin (2019) referred to these transactions as “sacred remittances” that might contribute to developmental materiality but also breed tensions, thereby tainting the “purity and cohesion of the moral community” (Garbin, 2019, p.2058). Similarly, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) led by Pastor Enoch Adeboye was reputed to provide spiritual support to Nigeria’s vice-president, Yemi Osinbajo, who is incidentally a pastor at the church.

Ordinarily, one would expect that such a high level of involvement in religious activities would lead citizens to adhere to the ideals and morals dictated by Christianity and Islam willingly and strictly, based on the principles of the golden rule and virtues such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and generosity. However, this is not always the case, as Nigerians tend to interpret issues through the framework of cultural chauvinism—that is, “the special sense that people have

²⁴³ See Laughing on his private jet- the £93m pastor accused of exploiting British worshippers. *Daily Mail* 21 October 2012. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2220833/Laughing-private-jet--93m-pastor-accused-exploiting-British-worshippers.html>

of themselves relative to others, the sense of superiority in the whole or in the particular” (Ibelema, 2021, p.1). This is often reflected in the news reports on corruption analysed in this thesis. Thus, religion can be a potent weapon for Muslims and Christians, who are engaged in a constant struggle to define narratives on the war on corruption and protect their political turf in a secular society.

The actions and opinions of religious leaders, who are also elites, play an important role in constructing the discourse on the anticorruption crusade. This is because media practitioners transmit the interpretations of this influential group in news reports, which reflect the underlying tensions between adherents of the two major faiths. Depending on the politics at play, debates on the anticorruption crusade tend to reveal the attachment of religious leaders to individuals who have been allegedly linked to corrupt practices. As expressed through sermons, revivals, public speeches, and writings, Toyin Falola observed a tendency among Muslims and Christians to engage in verbal aggression, thereby “creating a more or less permanent state of warfare of some kind.” He noted, “Even those who regard themselves as law abiding and peaceful either underplay the power of words to hurt and incite or deny altogether that they have the power to cause harm” (Falola, 1998, p.247).

For example, a Catholic archbishop weighed in on the scandal involving Walter Onnoghen; he seemed to validate the notion of anticipated electoral fraud, which is unacceptable and unequal in terms of its magnitude when contrasted with the sin of political corruption. In other words, he believed that it was more socially acceptable to steal public funds than to permit electoral malpractice in which the electorate’s votes do not count. The archbishop’s views were disseminated in the media to define what was at stake in the war against corruption.

Another example is the position of a group called the National Christian Elders Forum, which attributed Onnoghen's travails to the wiles of political "Islamism," which they defined as an "ideology which holds that wherever Islam is, Islam must dominate."²⁴⁴ In essence, the issue was seen as a *jihad* against the Christian population, who were then urged to ensure that "Islamists are not voted into power in 2019."

In response to the National Christian Elders Forum, the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) described the group's statements as religious blackmail and hypocrisy in a press release. Moreover, it argued that Muslims in Nigeria did not decry the actions of the previous president, Goodluck Jonathan (who is Christian), as "a Christian crusade" when he fired Justice Ayo Isa Salami, a Muslim who served as head of Nigeria's appellate court.²⁴⁵ It is clear that all the foregoing can constitute a basis for incitement and hate among ordinary, undiscerning citizens within a multi-ethnic, pluralistic society such as Nigeria. In reality, Falola (1998, p.247) wrote, "Nigerian Christianity cannot be fully understood today without analysing its perception of Islam, and the same is true also of Islam in relation to Christianity."

8.2. Ethnicity and the politics of the war against corruption

Like religion, understanding Nigeria's colonial past is relevant for understanding the role of ethnicity in the politics of the anticorruption crusade (Daura, 1971, p.41). In addition, the Nigerian military plays a central role in shaping the political,

²⁴⁴ 'ICYMI: Danjuma, other Christian elders reject Onnoghen's suspension, ACF backs Buhari.' See *The Punch*, 31 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/danjuma-other-christian-elders-reject-onnoghens-suspension-acf-backs-buhari/>

²⁴⁵ See 'Onnoghen: Islamic body speaks on Buhari govt declaring Jihad against Christians' *Daily Post* 23 April 2019, Retrieved from: <https://dailypost.ng/2019/04/23/onnoghen-islamic-body-speaks-buhari-govt-declaring-jihad-christians/>

economic, and socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary Nigeria, which is also pertinent for understanding the anticorruption discourse.

The ethnicity vicious cycle is largely rooted in a desire for good governance and the equitable distribution of material and human resources. A series of constitutional conferences organised by British colonialists from 1946 to 1959 represented an attempt to establish a framework for achieving consensus among the major ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Igbo in the South East, and the Yoruba in the South West. In addition, participants were mindful not to neglect the concerns of minorities to achieve good governance in the political affairs of Nigeria's emerging democracy.

After the first military coup in 1966, a general from the South East called Aguiyi Ironsi took over leadership of the country. He introduced the unitary form of governance as part of efforts to centralise political authority. This was strengthened with the passing of Unification Decree No. 34 in 1966, which aimed to curb "tribal loyalties and activities which promote tribal consciousness and sectional interests," and which must give way to the urgent task of national reconstruction" (Ajayi, 2005, p.91). Further to this and indeed with the creation of states by Yakubu Gowon in 1967, regionalism, though never entirely going away but always at the edge of the nation's political consciousness, had to stop.

However, Ironsi did not live long enough to see the impact of his policy, as he was assassinated a few months after in a counter coup mainly devised by northern military officials. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that his legacy of a unitary government remains in the Nigerian polity; it is often challenged by proponents of restructuring who often seek to return Nigeria to the path of regional federalism.

The coup and the counter coup stoked ethnic tensions and resulted in complexities, which eventually led to a full-scale civil war in 1967. In response to the retaliatory pogrom perpetrated against their kin in the northern part of the country, Igbo nationalists from the South East sought to secede from Nigeria to form the State of Biafra.

Notably, amid this crisis, the Nigerian military took steps to alleviate tensions and preserve the nation's unity. It demonstrated that ethnic loyalty could prove to be superior or transcend religious considerations, as evidenced by the appointment of a Christian minority from the north, General Yakubu Gowon, as president after Ironsi's death. Gowon later admitted, "I was petrified when I took over as Head of State." He continued, "I never planned to be the president, it just happened" (Egbas, 2020). Initially, 12 states were created in 1967 under Gowon; by 1996, Nigeria comprised a total of 36 states. Moreover, the nation's political capital, Abuja, was given the status of a state in the constitution. The last four states were created by General Sani Abacha, whose brutality against prodemocracy actors, journalists, and civil society organisations and looting of the national treasury remain unparalleled in the annals of Nigeria's political history.

After Ironsi's assassination, the two most senior military officers who were next in the chain of command also happened to be part of the Yoruba ethnic group from the southwestern region: Brigadier General Babafemi Ogundipe and Colonel Adeyinka Adebayo. While the former escaped to the United Kingdom, where he lived until his death, because the northern conspirators who organised the coup refused to take orders from him (Obasi, 2017), the latter was appointed governor to replace

Adekunle Fajuyi, the military governor of the western region who was assassinated alongside his guest, Ironsi (Adefaka & Akeredolu, 2011).

Since Gowon's time, successive military regimes and democratically elected leaders have recognised the need to adhere to balanced ethnic and religious representation in the political dynamics of the country. The only exception was the 1993 elections annulled by General Ibrahim Babangida, in which the popular candidate, Moshood K. Abiola, and his running mate, Babagana Kingibe, were both Muslims who campaigned on a joint ticket as president and vice-president. However, Nigeria's current president is a Sunni Muslim from the North West and the vice-president is a Christian from the South West and a senior pastor at a Pentecostal mega church.

Another aspect of the centralisation of the federal government that played an important role in the media's framing of corruption was revenue generation and the distribution of revenue between states and the federal government. According to the constitution, the federal government should receive a larger share of the revenue because it assumed responsibilities that were previously under the purview of specific regions, such as the takeover of three regional universities in Zaria in the north, Nsukka in the east, and Ife in the west. Moreover, the government took over agriculture marketing boards, which allowed it to assert greater control over state resources (Offensend, 1976) and engage in the political affairs of states.

Nigeria experienced an oil boom after the civil war. As a result, increased revenues accrued to the coffers of the federal government. Until then, the regions had engaged in healthy competition over agricultural production to earn foreign exchange for their development; however, they began to underperform after the onset of the oil boom, as agriculture was relegated to the background. Many states

became highly inefficient at revenue generation because they were very dependent on shared oil revenues and accustomed to receiving monthly subventions from the federal government.

It is important to note that crude oil resources, which come from the South South, form the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. This is also highly relevant to the discourse on ethnicity and the politics of the anticorruption crusade. As of June 2021, the revenue sharing formula in Nigeria specifies that the federal government takes 52.68% and the states share 26.72% of revenues. 13% of revenues is further allocated to the oil-producing states of southern Nigeria.

8.2.1. Impact of ethnoreligious issues on the Nigerian polity

Based on the above discourse, we can infer that both religion and ethnicity shape the political culture of Nigeria. For example, a Christian southerner will tolerate a Muslim southerner because of the overriding impact of ethnicity. Conversely, a northern Christian will be more hostile to a northern Muslim than to a Southern Muslim neighbour. This is reflected in news reports, which lends credence to the misconception of Northern Muslims as jihadists among Christians from all parts of the country.

There are historical antecedents that tend to justify this attitude, such as the jihadist activities of Uthman ibn Fodio and other fundamental Islamic activities that took place after independence, particularly the Maitatsine religious uprising of the 1980s (Hiskett, 1987). However, the latter pales in comparison to the current threat posed by Boko Haram in the North East and the subversive activities of the proscribed secessionist group led by Nnamdi Kanu, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), in the southeastern part of the country.

It is evident from the arms deal scandal that Buhari is perceived by many Nigerians as a hardcore Muslim northerner who attempted to intimidate or humiliate the government of his immediate predecessor, Jonathan, who is a Christian from an ethnic minority group. This perception was also observed in the corruption case involving Onnoghen, which can be interpreted as the political marginalisation of an ethnic minority from the South South by a dominant ethnic group from the north, the Hausa-Fulani. Onnoghen's exit from office could also be seen as being part of a northernisation agenda, since the immediate beneficiary of his departure was a Muslim from the north. This perceived bias is enhanced by the argument that Onnoghen came from the South South, which is the largest producer of crude oil in Nigeria. This suggests that the region that lays the "golden eggs" that sustain the entire country was persecuted by the ungrateful, "parasitic" north.²⁴⁶

On the other hand, the north values its large tracts of land, which are used in the cultivation of important staple crops and livestock production; these products are required by Nigerians of all classes throughout the country. However, some agricultural resources have been the subject of serious political contention in the news discourse. For example, the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in the north and the south deteriorated to the point that the sale of staple agricultural crops such as beans, onions, and maize produced in the north were suspended in the south for a period of time. Instead, these staples were sold to neighbouring West African countries until the resolution of the conflict. Such divisions influence the media's portrayal of the government's war on corruption.

²⁴⁶ See, 'Why I said Northerners are ungrateful parasites- Asari Dokubo' Retrieved from <http://nairaleak.blogspot.com/2015/01/why-i-said-northerners-are-ungrateful.html>

Most Igbo from the South East have aligned with the former President, Jonathan, due to his political patronage²⁴⁷ of the ethnic group during his governance. This alignment has deepened conflicts by opening up the wounds of the civil war. It explains why some key political actors and government critics from the South South, South East, and South West have demonstrated political sympathy for Sambo Dasuki, a Muslim northerner, based on political affiliation.

It is also significant that the South South has the highest number of media proprietors in Nigeria (Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika & Tejumaiye, 2015; see also Abubakre, 2017). Thus, it would appear that many media outlets owned by a proprietor from the South South,²⁴⁸ where Jonathan is from, stood by him. Indeed, it is easy to identify the use of frames related to the fight against corruption to persecute members of the opposition party in these newspapers.

In the broader context (as explained in Chapter One), the southern region of Nigeria effectively owns and commands a flourishing mainstream media landscape, which enables it to articulate and advocate for its position on the anticorruption crusade; this contrasts with the situation in the north. Thus, the researcher argues that ethnicity and religion are not simply reflected in corruption-related news reports; rather, both elements provide the structural and ideological framework for the rationalisation of the anticorruption war between 2015 and 2019.

²⁴⁷ As a presidential candidate in the 2015 national elections, Jonathan received the highest number of votes from the Igbo of the South East.

²⁴⁸ These newspapers include *Vanguard* and *ThisDay*.

8.3. Personalism and the politics of the war against corruption

Prior to independence, Nigerian nationalists such as Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Obafemi Awolowo were well-known for using their news outlets to bolster their personal image and promote their politics in their respective regions, in addition to championing the cause of anticolonialism. They sought to connect with the people, who in turn saw them as “inspired prophets” (AB, Nigerian, 1946).

Although colonial administrators were tasked with strengthening the hegemony of the British Empire in the aftermath of World War I, they also recognised the nationalists’ ability to create a lasting impression in the minds of uncritical members of the public. In the fierce struggle for political power among these leaders, the colonialists became concerned about how nationalists deployed the instrumentality of the print media within a multi-ethnic society. This prompted a series of interventions, which culminated in the Mirror Group of London investing in the Nigerian newspaper industry under the watch of Cecil Harmsworth King²⁴⁹. This development ushered in an era of professionally guided journalistic practice in the Nigerian media industry.

It can also be argued that the centralisation policy introduced by the military government in 1966 further entrenched the culture of personalisation of power in Nigerian politics. Leaders emerged as the face of or “dispensers” of political patronage, a situation which in turn, made such leaders to adopt a populist stance in

²⁴⁹ King’s protégé, Babatunde Jose, who would later become editor of the Daily Times recalled how he was charged by the management Board of the news outlet: ‘your country is now approaching independence. People say the paper is foreign controlled. We want this paper to be independent with the country. We want an editor who knows this country and who would lead it to independence and after independence.’ See Awoyinfa, M. and Igwe, D. (2011) *Segun Osoba: The Newspaper Years*, Lagos: Corporate Biographers Limited. p.18.

their relationship with the public, in the bid to earn legitimacy. This situation is instructive given that the constitution was suspended under the military dictatorship.

While this situation effectively sidelined the legislative and judicial branches of government under the military, it strengthened the executive branch's hegemonic hold over the two other arms of government with the return of democracy. Thus, political leaders often find it difficult to adhere to the principle of separation of powers, because the legislature and the judiciary branch cannot always effectively check the power of the executive branch. Over the years, personalism has also manifested in the consistent domination of federal politics by Muslim northerners. This provides a fertile ground for Christian religious leaders and their followers to view Muslims and Muslim political leaders as "enemies" to overcome and to gain political mastery over them. In essence, there is strong antagonism and the "othering" of Muslims and the north as part of the politics of the anticorruption crusade.

Voltmer (2002) underscored the significant interplay between such political conflicts and media parallelism when she noted that "polarisation along religious or ethnic lines bears the risk of spinning out of control and turning into hatred or even civil war" (2002, p.229). The above points indicate the alignment of power in Nigerian society; as a mirror of society, mainstream newspapers are replete with reports about this circumstances of ethnoreligious considerations.²⁵⁰ In addition, it is important to note the ways in which media professionals utilise news values such as prominence, negativity/positivity, and drama/conflict in corruption coverage. According to Chomsky (2002), media outlets fulfil their purpose in society through "the way they select topics, distribute their concerns, frame issues, filter information, focus their analyses, through emphasis, tone, and a whole range of other techniques" (Chomsky, 2002, p.15). All these elements constitute the thematic focus of the propaganda model.

²⁵⁰ Looking with hindsight into journalistic news values and processes, which, though, is significant in some aspects of news routines, the mere fact that corruption issues concern individuals and political groups in power, means that journalism professionals cannot afford to ignore them.

Nevertheless, political leaders adopt populist strategies to achieve personalism. For example, Gowon's message of "No Victor and No Vanquished" was designed to unite the South East with the rest of the country. Moreover, Murtala Muhammad was noted for his corrective regime to fight corruption and his "Nigeria First" policy in international relations. In addition, Olusegun Obasanjo is remembered for his nationalism in his capacity as both the country's military head of state and democratically elected president. Other leaders who achieved notoriety in the personalisation of office include Babangida, who was often referred to as a "Maradona" or an "evil genius."²⁵¹ Abacha, who was notorious for oppressing pro-democracy groups such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and his corrupt practices, was still viewed as shrewd in the management of the national economy by his supporters; during Abacha's tenure, petrol prices remained stable, and the foreign reserve was on the rise. In the media, however, Abacha was second only to Jonathan in reports of corruption while in office.

While Buhari was not elected based on his communication abilities, his strong political capital largely rested on his reputation for detesting corruption. As the military head of state from 1983 to 1984, he introduced the "War Against Indiscipline." Coupled with his ascetic lifestyle, this is why Buhari is fondly referred to as "Mai Gaskiya," which loosely translates to the "honest one," among his followers, particularly those from the northern part of the country. It was Buhari's credibility, which was built around the anticorruption crusade, that put him ahead of the incumbent president, Jonathan, at the polls in 2015.

²⁵¹ Babangida was one of Nigeria's longest serving military rulers. He was nicknamed "Maradona" because he engaged in different subterfuges to mask his real intention of not wanting to relinquish power to a democratically elected government. He employed series of strategies to stay in power, including bribes. See Osoba (1996, p.382).

In summary, Nigeria's main problem after independence was neither religion nor ethnicity. This does not mean that they do not play a part in the political process; rather, they tend to remain in the background until politicians use them to divide and rule the people. Once divisions are created and the elites' purpose is achieved, the masses are cast aside. Within the framework of macro-politics, politicians cooperate within their political parties without consideration for religion or ethnicity; however, the masses continue to nurture the seeds of discord planted by elites. In reality, corruption is the country's main problem, and it is often used as justification by coup plotters for successive changes in government. Thus, we must consider the crucial role of journalists as political actors themselves (Cook, 2005). This is the focus of the next chapter, which presents interviews with journalism professionals and journalism academics in Nigeria.

CHAPTER NINE

9.0. Analysis of Field Interviews on Media Coverage of Political Corruption in Nigeria

9.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings from interviews with journalists, editors, government spokespersons, and journalism scholars in Nigeria. They address two of the main research questions in this thesis:

1. What challenges do Nigerian journalists face in reporting corruption stories under the Buhari administration?
2. How has ownership of the media impacted the coverage of corruption and the Buhari administration's anticorruption war?

By necessity, the theme of the anticorruption crusade is associated with demands for public accountability. The latter is a significant component of democracy, in which journalism plays a critical role. In addition, since the journalistic process mainly relies on interviews, the journalists interviewed for this research directly covered corruption and anticorruption. The participants, who were essentially political journalists, were drawn from the six mainstream news outlets chosen for the study: *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, *ThisDay*, *Vanguard*, and *Premium Times*.

The decision to use these newspapers was established in Chapter Three²⁵² of this thesis. While the *Daily Trust* is acknowledged as a frontline newspaper with particular appeal in the northern part of Nigeria, *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard* are considered the “country’s most successful, most visible, and most powerful newspapers” (Adebanwi 2013, p.83). Prior

²⁵² See Chapter 3 on the political economy of the Nigerian media.

to the interviews, corruption-related stories from these newspapers were subjected to content analyses to identify news frames.

9.2. Overview of interviews

This chapter is divided into two main parts. First, the researcher asked government spokespersons to define the war against corruption, as understood by the government. Then, they were asked to evaluate the Nigerian media's role in the fight against corruption. In addition, they were asked whether the media had accurately portrayed the government's anticorruption war.

The second part of the chapter presents discussion with the key participants in this research: journalists, editors, and managerial staff at the media organisations chosen for the study. The role of journalists and editors is critical, as they must not only decide whether to cover a particular corruption story but also make decisions about to present news to the public. In the introduction of her seminal work *Making News: A Study in Construction of Reality* (1978), Gaye Tuchman noted that “news is an interchange among politicians and policymakers, news workers and their organisational superiors, and that the rest of us are eavesdroppers on that ongoing conversation” (Tuchman, 1978, p. x).

In this research, the “eavesdroppers” is taken care of by inviting journalism experts to render an assessment of media coverage of corruption. They were asked to undertake this task because these particular individuals have distinguished themselves as journalism teachers and for their scholarly contributions to the field of journalism. Their research on the socio-cultural context of journalism practice in Nigeria is of particular importance.

9.3 Procedure

First, the researcher began the semi-structured interviews by asking journalists which of their roles in society they considered to be the most important. They were also asked to define from their own perception, what is meant by the war on corruption under the Buhari administration dwelling on those issues and ideas which fall under the label of “war on corruption.” Their answers were relevant to this research because they provided useful insights on how journalists in Nigeria cover corruption and relate with the government and its anticorruption efforts. Indeed, Donsbach (2008, p.2605) noted that the way journalists perceive their role influences the “way they interact with news sources and make decisions about news selection and presentation.”

The researcher also asked journalists whether they participated in editorial meetings and prompted them to reflect on their work and evaluate the degree of editorial freedom that they have in the framing of corruption news stories. Finally, the researcher asked participants to identify the challenges that they face in reporting news about corruption and highlight ways in which the ownership of their media establishment impacted this coverage.

Then, the researcher asked managers and editors to explain the main objectives of their media organisations and the nature of their work, specifically with regard to their supervision and coordination of reporters and/or other editors who work under them. The researcher enquired whether any corporate strategies were introduced by the participants’ media organisations with respect to the coverage of the government’s anticorruption war. Furthermore, the researcher also asked media managers and editors whether they believed that they had an impact on the Buhari government’s policies, particularly their reporting of corruption news stories. Participants were also asked to identify the challenges that they face in the production of corruption-related news stories. They were requested to share what works in their

organisations. Finally, the researcher asked participants whether they thought their media organisations brought enough attention to the government's anticorruption crusade. A detailed interview schedule can be found in the Appendix of this thesis.

Table 9: Defining the “what” of the fight against corruption by government spokespersons

Source	Title	Quotations	Meaning
Garba Shehu	Senior special assistant to the president on media and publicity	“The war against corruption by the administration means a systematic engagement that seeks to upturn corruption that has become normative in our affairs. This should translate into attitudinal change through public enlightenment and where possible, punishment or retribution so that societal approval of corruption is turned into disapproval. In terms of its focus, government places a lot of emphasis on the recovery of stolen assets and their being used for public good, instead of jail terms for convicts without assets recovery.”	Speaking against corruption, seeking punishments for the culprits through legal frameworks. More importantly, to recover money stolen from the nation’s commonwealth.
Tolu Ogunlesi	Special assistant to the president on digital/new media	“I think that this “war” cannot be understood without understanding where we were in 2011 to 2015, with the scale and nature of corruption that was powered from the highest levels in government, from the very top. That context is very important. It is only against that backdrop that we can perhaps understand how far we have come—and I think we have come quite some way, even as there is still considerable work ahead of us. Corruption in Nigeria cannot be purged overnight, and it is not even possible in any society to completely root out corruption, but I think that it is possible for a government to demonstrate a seriousness to fight it, to refuse to endorse it, to refuse to grant it immunity at the highest levels of governance.”	“Context” refers to the inevitability of a situation in which members of the opposition may be blamed for corruption. This is because they had been in charge since May 1999 (16 years in power) before the inauguration of the current president, Muhammed Buhari, on May 29, 2015.

Assessments of the media’s role in the fight against corruption

Garba Shehu	Senior special assistant to the president on media and publicity	“The attitude of the larger section of the media is lack of cooperation, if not outright hostility to the war against corruption. This is unsurprising because there are in the media, as you have in the rest of society, a large number of beneficiaries of the old order who desperately seek to cling to privileges they are used to.”	Negativity against the government’s anticorruption efforts. Media sector as beneficiaries of previous corrupt practices.
Tolu Ogunlesi	Special assistant to the president on digital/new media	“It has not been very encouraging, going by the quality of the reporting. It has been reduced to mostly sensationalism, sadly. I believe that it is the role of the media to, in addition to holding government accountable, also analyze, explain, and accurately inform the public. There is so much about the fight against corruption that as far as I am concerned isn’t properly or adequately reported or even analysed. For example, the growing use of asset forfeitures by the EFCC and the ICPC. This was not the case before 2015, and it is the deliberate outcome of foundational work done by the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC), which was one of the first committees the president set up when he took office. Also, I haven’t seen a lot of focus on institutional reforms like the treasury single account (TSA), which, though not introduced by the Buhari administration, has seen implementation pushed to a considerable extent since 2015. Apart from TSA, there are also projects by the Ministry of Finance using technology to gather information and data on transactions and property ownership, to help plug holes in tax compliance. Also, the whistleblowing policy of 2016 that led to the recovery of \$43 million from an apartment in Ikoyi in 2017, one of the biggest such recoveries in recent times. I am	Episodic, lukewarm, biased, and selective reporting of government anticorruption activities instead of dwelling on analysing the novelties introduced by the government to fight corruption from different the larger picture frontiers.

not seeing any informed or contextual reporting of these things and what they have meant or will mean for the country's fight against corruption. The tendency towards sensationalism and shallowness is disturbing."

Assessment of the media's portrayal of the fight against corruption

Garba Shehu	Senior special assistant to the president on media and publicity	It could be better. On a daily basis, we witness deliberate misrepresentations and distortion of the messaging from government, especially in the new media. The media must buy into the anti-corruption Way before they can persuade their readers to come along.	Media framing of corruption and anticorruption news content. The media's failure to follow the fight against corruption means a deficit in expected gains with regard to influencing the masses to avoid corruption. As a result, the public will rely more on social media to stay up-to-date on progress and challenges in the war against corruption. This affects the sale of newspapers.
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9.4. The role of journalists in society

According to Hanitzch (2019), understanding journalistic roles can fulfil a dual function in society. Not only can it provide a source of institutional legitimacy, but it is relevant to our understanding of the cognitive framework that journalists employ to accomplish their duties. Thus, as part of the present study, the researcher interviewed participants from the six chosen media outlets about the most important roles that journalists should play in society.

The participants said that providing information and holding government accountable were the key roles that they played in society. The responses obtained were serial. They range from “informing, educating, and entertaining” to “giving correct information and its dissemination.” In addition, they said that journalists’ duties included “accurately [informing] the public,” “giving updates on happenings,” “holding public officers accountable, promoting democracy,” “pursuing good governance,” and “safeguarding human rights.” They saw journalism as a profession that exposes injustice in society. The participants felt obliged to bear the responsibility that comes with being a journalist. In other words, they were keenly aware of the social significance of their work, which imposed a sense of ethics on them. For example, George from *The Punch* said the following:

*Being a journalist bestows a certain responsibility on me, which must be guided to establish and disseminate genuine information to the public. My role in the public must be impartial. In clear terms, I serve as a link between the people and government.*²⁵³

²⁶³ Citations from participants are distinguished from other references in this study through italics.

Similarly, David from *Vanguard* noted that “*providing accurate, balanced and timely information to enable citizens take informed decisions about their lives*” is a crucial role played by journalists. This view was shared by Lere from the *Daily Trust*:

People have the right to know what is going on in our society. As a journalist, my role is to give accurate information at all times to the society which is very important for that society to grow democracy and to help people make a wise and informed decision.

Meanwhile, Adesina described journalists’ role as “*promoting democracy, good governance and protecting human rights.*” Specifically in the Nigerian context, Azeez argued that journalists should assume a watchdog role. He said that “*beyond the cliché role of journalists as disseminators and producers of information, in contemporary times, especially in a society like ours, the job of every journalist should be to hold government to account.*” Journalists who covered corruption stories also referred to constitutional provisions to justify what society expects of them in a democracy.

The above quotations reveal the roles that journalists are expected to fulfil in society. However, it remains to be seen whether these assertions align with journalists’ actual job performance, as shown in the content analyses of their outputs. For instance, in early coverage of the arms deal scandal involving Sambo Dasuki, journalists from several outlets used phrases such as “it was learnt” and “it was gathered” to maintain distance between themselves and the facts being reported. Debates about corrupt acts allegedly committed by Dasuki and his associates and the government’s anticorruption efforts often took place within a

political environment tainted by human rights violations perpetrated by security forces such as the Department of State Security (DSS), the police, or the army on the instructions of political actors.

Journalists appeared to be active participants in a story when they referenced playing such roles as monitoring an unfolding story to provide a summary the events. Mellado (2015) referred to these two domains as the presence of the journalistic voice in media products, wherein a greater presence of journalistic voice in reporting directly corresponds to a higher level of intervention in the role of the journalist. Similarly, Pantti (2019, p.155) emphasised the importance of a journalist's presence at a scene to obtain first-hand reports about an event, which she noted "lends credibility and authenticity to the journalist and to his/her news organisation." All of which can form the basis for moral engagement with and the interpretation of news on corruption and the government's anticorruption efforts.

9.5 Editorial meetings and engagement

Participants were asked whether they attended editorial meetings at their media organisations and, if so, how often. All of them indicated that they attended editorial meetings and that their attendance varied from daily to once or twice weekly, except when they had to be absent. As Joshua said of his media organisation, *Vanguard*, these meetings aimed to ensure that "*we develop a strategy on what we intend to produce and to stay on track. Our reporters come up with ideas and we discuss it and how to ensure it meets the deadline for the paper.*" According to participants, such discussions generally centred around who would cover what story, how to approach stories, and which stories to "bank" for future publication, those stories that were to be stepped down, and so on. It was implied that the tone of stories on the fight against corruption would be decided at these editorial meetings. This scenario may also create self-censorship. This is because some issues, such as Boko Haram's terrorist activities in the north,

could fall under the purview of national security. In extreme cases, such stories might result in a clampdown on the news outlet and journalists if mismanaged. For example, the Nigerian Army shut down the *Daily Trust* offices in Abuja and Maiduguri in January 2019 and arrested both the northern regional editor and a reporter over media reports that were considered unfavourable to the military.²⁵⁴

9.6 Contextualising the anticorruption war in the eyes of journalists

Participants tended to highlight the endemic corruption in Nigeria by lamenting its negative socio-economic and political impacts. In contextualising the government's anticorruption crusade, media practitioners mentioned the following issues:

1. Corruption was endemic before the current government.
2. Some hypocrisy can be observed on the part of the government.
3. The anticorruption crusade is a vendetta enacted by the government against members of the main opposition party.
4. The government has poorly coordinated the anticorruption campaign.
5. The government's anticorruption war is laudable but selective.

²⁵⁴ Outrage greets military's arrest of Daily Trust journalists' closure of Abuja, Maiduguri offices' Vanguard, 7 January 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/01/outrage-greets-militarys-arrest-of-daily-trust-journalists-closure-of-abuja-maiduguri-offices/>

Table 10: Below gives specific detailed illustrations of media practitioners' views on how they view the war against corruption.

Definition of the anticorruption war	Examples of media practitioners' perceptions of the anticorruption crusade	Participant	Newspaper
<p>Vendetta-seeking</p> <p>Definition: a hostile, retaliatory move against the main opposition party</p>	<p>“Under the present administration, the war on corruption has been reduced to vendetta-seeking. We have ministers that are standing trial for fraud allegations but are free because they are members of the ruling party. The chairman of the ruling party said during the last election campaigns that once you join the ruling party, your sins are forgiven. This assertion nailed the credibility of the present government in fighting corruption.”</p> <p>“There seems not to be any war on corruption per se. What we see seems to be war against perceived enemies and antagonists, especially those in opposition. In recent times, there have been some efforts which, unfortunately, are not being allowed to come to fruition by those in the corridors of power. When the society is commending government for sanitising the system by waging a kind of war, you discover that there are often no positive conclusions. This, I believe, is because a large number of those around the president and his party are directly or indirectly involved in acts of corruption.”</p> <p>“There is nothing like war on corruption under the Buhari administration. What we have is war against opposition figures.”</p>	<p>Ayo</p> <p>Ifeanyi</p> <p>Mike</p>	<p><i>The Punch</i></p> <p><i>Vanguard</i></p> <p><i>ThisDay</i></p>
<p>Selective</p>	<p>“The current war against corruption is laudable but selective. It tends to target political opponents of the ruling party (APC). I also think it targets the small</p>	<p>Joe</p>	<p><i>ThisDay</i></p>

<p>Definition: unfair discrimination against opponents, unequal focus on petty corruption crimes rather than high-level transgressions</p>	<p>guys while turning a blind eye to the big guys. It has also not targeted the root causes of corruption in our society, like the building of strong institutions that would remain for posterity.”</p> <p>“Buhari administration is not embarking on a holistic fight against corruption; he is doing a selective fight against corruption.”</p> <p>“The fight against corruption seems to be a cherry-picking kind of thing. It is more like who the government says is corrupt. Those who government says are not corrupt, no matter what the public outcry, they are not corrupt and are likely to go scot-free. This does not instil confidence in the public to make it look more effective in the prosecution of the anticorruption war.”</p>	<p>Chioma</p> <p>Usman</p>	<p><i>Premium Times</i></p> <p><i>ThisDay</i></p>
<p>Pretext</p> <p>Definition: false motives for the anticorruption war</p>	<p>“Fighting corruption is not bad as long as it is done with sincerity of purpose.</p>	<p>Paul</p>	<p><i>The Nation</i></p>
<p>Pervasive corruption</p> <p>Definition: frequent coverage of corruption</p>	<p>“Regular issues of trying to recover looted funds through the law courts.”</p>	<p>Bello</p>	<p><i>Daily Trust</i></p>

<p>Hypocrisy</p> <p>Definition: failure to adhere to moral rules and principles in confronting corruption</p>	<p>“As a journalist, I think the war against corruption is not properly coordinated, hence the failure of Nigeria to make significant improvement on Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index. Most of the high-profile corruption cases are politically motivated, while there is a lack of coordination among the several agencies involved. Hence, most high-profile cases are lost in court. The war against corruption is largely reactionary and not preventive in nature. The focus seems to be more on loot recovery rather than effective prosecution. Also, other arms of government such as the judiciary and the legislature and other tiers of government like the state and local governments are not keying into this fight, hence its failure.”</p>	<p>Uche</p>	<p><i>The Punch</i></p>
<p>Double standard</p> <p>Definition: application of different criteria or contrasting principles in the anticorruption war</p>	<p>“If a corruption story is about those in the opposition, you are free to write anything because government will like you, but if it is about those that are in government . . . you do it with caution. The fight against corruption is not yet there . . . it is mostly a noise now, but that noise has its own advantage of creating or keeping it in the consciousness of the people.”</p>	<p>Adesina</p>	<p><i>ThisDay</i></p>

Esther, for instance, said that the fight against corruption essentially concerned financial matters:

They include issues such as looting of public funds, money laundering, including unaccounted and misappropriation of public funds by public officers. Since the inception of the administration in 2015, these corruption labels formed the ground norm upon which ex-public office holders accused of financial impropriety are being prosecuted by government anti-graft agencies.

This perspective was echoed by Bello from *Daily Trust*, who noted that the war against corruption consisted of efforts made by Buhari “to stop leakages in government spending, change the way government officials spend money recklessly, and bring discipline in the way public institutions are run. It also involves prosecuting public officials suspected of mismanaging public resources.” Although seemingly positive towards the war on corruption, these two concordance views should be taken with a grain of salt. This is because they were expressed by management staff at the top of their respective organisations’ hierarchy, who would not want to be labelled as not keying into the government’s agenda.

Beyond this, a common theme among interviewees was criticism of the anticorruption war as askew and often used to attack political opponents of the government. Another view is that a new breed of corruption was emerging through ethnicity, as evidenced by acts of nepotism attributed to the president and his allies. Here, the perception from participants suggested a kind of socio-imaginary line in public life, a form of irony which portrayed a “wrongness” in which a new error occurred in the government’s attempts to set things right. These participants blamed negative perceptions of the anticorruption efforts on Buhari himself; to a certain extent, his handling of the matter represented a broken promise and a betrayal of the populism that propelled him into office in 2015.

Again, those excesses in the criticism of the government agenda stemmed from the news organisations' predispositions and the prejudices of the environment that produce them. In light of this, the government would not be seen to be wrong with its engagement of top journalists to counter them. Conversely, some participants based their perceptions of the president's strong political capital on his reputation for detesting corruption. It was this legitimacy, that put him ahead of his rivals at the 2015 polls, as the government spokespersons emphasised.

However, participants from the media industry focused on the actions (and inaction) of government officials and members of the ruling party. They used this evidence to expose faults in the government's anticorruption endeavours and often alluded to acts of ethical transgressions committed by government officials. This state of affairs has immensely undermined the fight against corruption. This criticism would be apposite if the definition of corruption is expanded to cover other acts of impropriety that may not be misappropriation of funds. It is a situation of putting a round peg in a square hole, a metaphor exemplified by the effect of nepotism in the government's key security appointments. Words employed by media practitioners to describe the anticorruption war included "hypocrisy," "vendetta," "lip service," "pretext," "cherry picking," and "double standard" (see Table 6 for examples).

However, such lopsided opinions cannot be conceded hook, line, and sinker because many members of government in the ruling party have cases against them in the law courts, which were not halted by the government. They are presumed innocent until they are convicted. As for the claim that a journalist is not free to write corruption stories on serving government officials, it is an exaggeration carried far because the note of caution made by the journalist here cannot be proved. This is because their

newspaper is interested in exposing corrupt individuals in government without attracting adverse repercussions, except if it is a lie.

One example of corruption highlighted by participants was a story published by *Premium Times* in July 2018 on the forgery of an exemption certificate for the mandatory National Youth Service Corps by a serving minister, Kemi Adeosun.²⁵⁵ The president was accused of not acting on this matter before Adeosun resigned from office. Buhari's populist demeanour is similar to U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's handling of cases involving his cabinet members, Matt Hancock on violation of covid rules, Priti Patel, on bullying of staff in her ministry and Dominic Cummings for several abrasive behaviours, who were vilified by the opposition and the British press; however, Johnson did not budge. In Adeosun's case, she went to court after her resignation and secured a verdict of no wrongdoing. Participants also cited the president's appointment of cabinet ministers who had already been indicted for corruption or had corruption cases against them in the courts, such as Bashir Magashi (the minister for defence) and Godswill Akpabio (the minister of the Niger Delta). Others mentioned the case of a former governor of Gombe State, Danjuma Goje,²⁵⁶ whose corruption cases were discontinued by the government following intense horse-trading over the leadership of the Ninth National Assembly.

²⁵⁵ See Abdulaziz, A. 'Exclusive: Finance Minister Kemi Adeosun skips NYSC, forges certificate' *Premium Times*, 7 July 2018, Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/investigationspecial-reports/275319-exclusive-finance-minister-kemi-adeosun-skips-nysc-forges-certificate.html>

²⁵⁶ Goje was a two-term governor of Gombe State before serving as a senator in the National Assembly. He was a leading contender for senate president but was forced to step aside for the ruling party's preferred candidate. A day after meeting with, Goje's corruption cases for fraud that amounted to 25 billion naira during his tenure as governor were withdrawn from the court. See Kabir, A (2019) 'How EFCC, AGF's strange 'romance' saved Goje after surrendering Senate Presidency bid' *Premium Times* 6 July 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/339222-how-efcc-agfs-strange-romance-saved-goje-after-surrendering-senate-presidency-bid.html>

Participants mentioned a new breed of corruption known as “regulatory overreach,” which Baba described as “*the loudest and most scandalous expression of corruption under the Buhari government.*” It refers to theft by prominent institutions and major regulators committed with the aid of people in government. Baba cited the case of the Central Bank of Nigeria, which “*set up three regimes of exchange rates.*” He said,

If you want foreign exchange, you could either buy at the official rate at 360 naira to the dollar or by some very non-transparent mechanisms, you could also buy it at another official rate of 305 naira to a dollar. How you get this rate of 305 naira to the dollar has been subjected to a lot of abuse, and people have pointed out cases of corruption where people who have bought millions at the rate of 305 naira to a dollar only to sell it at 365 naira to a dollar through bureau de change.

A counter-frame to this position was the strategy of shifting the blame on something else, such as emphasising the importance of “context” in the fight against corruption. This was articulated by the president’s special assistant on digital media, Tolu Ogunlesi (see the above table) and reveals a sense of inevitability that members of the opposition would be blamed for corruption-causing ills of the country because the major opposition party, the PDP, was in charge of governance for 16 out of 20 years since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 2015.

In summary, journalists perceived skewness as the most notorious feature of the Buhari government’s anticorruption efforts. In light of this, what features most prominently in the public agenda was the recourse to the safety net of embracing the tenets of democracy and adherence to the rule of law, which the government considered as hostile and antithetical to the anticorruption war. This was evident from the framing of corruption and anticorruption news in the case studies considered in this thesis. However, while the media recognised that something had to be done about corruption in Nigeria, there was disagreement about how to effectively tackle it.

9.7 Editorial freedom

In this study, editorial freedom refers to the journalists' ability to cover any corruption story for their media outlet without fear or favour. Most participants reported having adequate freedom to frame corruption news stories. As Uche of *The Punch* indicated,

We enjoy absolute freedom in the framing of corruption news stories that comes to our table, as long as the stories are confirmed by a security or anticrime agency, and we seek reactions from the concerned persons or organization to balance the news stories.

The above statement was a common view among interviewees from other media outfits interviewed for this research. Words used in relation to editorial freedom included "100%," "good," "total freedom," "very free," "very much," "appreciable," and "very appropriate." A central theme that emerged was that editorial freedom for corruption news stories was subject to internal factors at news organisations. Mike, a deputy news editor at *ThisDay*, highlighted editorial concerns:

Sometimes, if a reporter writes a story that is vague or a sentence or paragraph is not too clear, we can call on the reporter to come and clarify what he meant by so and so; otherwise, when a reporter writes a story, he goes home. We on our own, we edit every other thing that we need to add and take away anything we feel that might either cause trouble or cause crisis.

There must always be a gatekeeper, somebody who sits down somewhere to look at a story and say no, this guy is telling lies here. So, anything that you know is not factual, you can cut it off to avert problem. We do that very well, and that one comes not in sense of censorship, it comes in form of editing. Anything you know is controversial, or is not factual, you first of all in editing it, you cut it off.

Through this process, journalists and editors subconsciously subscribe to what Tuchman (1972, p.661) described as a ritualistic strategy to "anticipate attack or defensively to deflect criticism." In the same way, Lateef of *The Nation* indicated that, while editors try to preserve the content of a story, reporters "sometimes do not get the story pegs" right. He recalled the example of a journalist who was assigned to cover an anticorruption event:

[The reporter] started his report by saying the conference started with an opening prayer and midway into it, the EFCC chairman was saying they recovered about 1 billion naira from somewhere. We had to call the reporter, which one comes first? Is it the opening prayer at the conference or the 1 billion recovered, which one is relevant to the public? So, in terms of pegs, most of the reporters do not get their pegs right. We guide them, but we do not tamper with whatever they write.

The above story shows that, in the framing of corruption news, editors and reporters often negotiate over the specific newsworthiness of an event due to editorial concerns. However, some participants' views of "editorial freedom" differed, as they provided different examples of the pressure that they come under in the coverage of corruption. As Ifeanyi indicated,

Your freedom only stops when you submit your report. So, because of the hierarchy, as a reporter, whether senior reporter or field reporter, your own duty is to make sure you get the story. Nobody stops you from writing your story or submitting your report, but where the challenge lie is when you submit it.

The above assertion was corroborated by Usman, who noted that "*freedom is limited to what the media owner allows. Friends, associates, and loved ones of media owners cannot be seen to be 'stigmatised' by media reports on corruption. Such reports are either toned down or not used.*" This implies that journalists are accountable to their superiors.

As Paul described,

There is editorial freedom but, once in a while, you come under pressure from government officials or members of the ruling party if they feel the published content is not favourable to them or it has exposed their roles in corrupt practices.

Joe said that "*it depends on who is involved in the corruption cases. There is a wide latitude to report on corruption matters, but there have been times when my reports on corruption cases are censored, especially when the story is exclusive to me.*" Thus, Joe seemed to imply that newspaper proprietors would not hesitate to interfere if they believed that the content of a story was detrimental to their interests. In the context of the Nigerian media, Yushau (2010) and Ojebode (2013) both explained that self-censorship may occur as a result of the personalities of those involved in corruption matters.

9.8 Journalists' challenges in reporting corruption news stories

This section addresses a major research question of this thesis which is, what challenges do Nigerian journalists face in reporting corruption stories under the Buhari administration?

9.8.1 Access to information

A major challenge reported by interview participants across the six media outlets was the problem of access to information, which lies at the core of the relationship between journalists and their sources, whom they must turn to produce news stories about corruption. Across journalistic and editorial levels, most participants echoed the following points:

1. There is a lack of access to government information and documents that would aid in the writing of corruption stories.
2. Governmental agencies refuse to provide information, even after it is requested under the Freedom of Information Act.
3. Anticorruption agencies refuse to provide information, especially when individuals involved in a corruption case are close to the president.

Deji, an editor at *The Punch*, lamented the lack of access to vital information due to public officials' tendency to hide behind bureaucratic bottlenecks:

The problem is that people do not want to come up. It is about covering and covering. The inability of those in government to open their doors on all issues, let me say the refusal of those in charge, failure to release information and to respond to inquiries.

A reporter at the same media outlet, George, echoed this argument by stressing that government organisations usually “*conceals evidence*” when trying to obtain access to necessary information which could aid the fight against corruption. He elaborated that “*even when you use the Freedom of Information Act to force them to talk or give documents, they frustrate the effort and make sure you don't get the needed material for your story. When you use unnamed sources, it waters down the credibility of the story and*

creates a window of doubt.” Although the use of anonymous sources was widely seen as useful to journalists’ quest to hold the powerful to account, in this case, however, such confidential sources which often emanate from the antigraft agencies, are employed to reveal information that indicts corrupt individuals and organisations, which ordinarily, may cause legal problems for the journalist and their news organisation and the government accused of prejudicial acts. This results in a reluctance to attribute such information through official channels.

When asked about challenges, Ismail of the *Vanguard* responded as follows:

There is dearth of information. Information on spendings is not readily available; lack of transparency is a challenge. The Buhari administration runs an opaque government. Even when there is nothing to hide, the government will still not release information. This often results in speculations.

Another participant from *ThisDay* averred that “*getting information from unconfirmed sources and confirming them from official sources is a major challenge.*” Similarly, Azeez at *Premium Times* added that “*the willingness of government agencies to speak up or provide documents and cooperate with me to establish fraudulent activities remains a daunting task.*” He further explained,

Agencies set up to fight corruption only dish out what they want the people to know. Nigerian government officials see journalists, especially ethical journalists, as enemies who are trying to dabble into their business which, they believe, should be rightly conducted in the dark and therefore find it extremely unnecessary to give information to the media.

Similarly, Adesina, a deputy editor at *ThisDay*, reflected on the corruption cases involving Sambo Dasuki and Walter Onnoghen:

As journalists, we were not allowed access to the suspects. More often than not, we have to rely on press statement issued by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, which expectedly was usually one-sided. The situation got a little better when the suspect [Dasuki] was charged to court, we were able to report the charges filed and the accused person’s response to the charges . . . closely related to the above is the issue of mutual suspicion between the anticorruption agencies and journalists. It is always very difficult to get information from these agencies; they only make public what they wanted the public to know and not what the public actually wanted

to know. Another challenge is that media owners do not want to fund investigation. You are forced to rely on what anticorruption agencies give to you, which more often than not is one-sided.

These findings suggest that journalists who cover corruption must often consult government officials and agencies (particularly anticorruption agencies) for news. On the surface, this seems like a straightforward way to gather authoritative information that would not generate legal trouble over allegations of corruption. Then, journalists would disseminate this information to the public without appearing to take sides in their reporting.

In reality, as chapters 5, 6, and 7 on the analyses of contents of the six newspapers revealed, how journalists interpret and frame this information differs across media outlets, especially with regard to determining whose voices are heard in their reports and whose credibility will have implication for the reports produced by a newspaper. For instance, *ThisDay* tended to rely more on sources drawn from members and sympathisers of the main opposition party in its corruption news reports, even in coverage of court proceedings. For example, it included quotations from the defence counsels in the trials of Dasuki and Onnoghen. In an interview with a *ThisDay* editor, he stated that, with the exception of the report of corruption stories from the courts, where the story is published in full, it is equally important for a journalist to report the views of all parties involved in the matter. He notes:

If you say a minister has misappropriated so and so amount of money, depending on the information you have, you must ensure that you get their own reaction to make the story balanced; let them react, let them counter it or not say something. If you go ahead to report that story from only one side of the story, they can sue you, and suing you may mean either closing down your newspaper or you are paying very huge damages, so you must get a reaction from anybody alleged for corruption, you must get the other side to defend themselves.

Conversely, it was found that *The Nation* frequently cited anonymous sources drawn from anticorruption agencies and the government to produce reports on corruption. Journalists rely on anticorruption agencies for news about corruption and the anticorruption war, while anticorruption agencies rely on journalists and editors to embed news about corruption in their journalistic products. News items are published in media outlets, and their content is transmitted, interpreted, and reviewed on various radio and television channels for different audiences across the country.

However, this does not mean that these journalists do not strive to be objective or limit their biases in their coverage of corruption. Rather, this study draws attention to the fact that journalists and editors' interpretative schemas, as reflected in their outputs in both hard copy and online, have implications for how their readers understand the Nigerian government's war on corruption.

Thus, the key principles of journalism among which, is the commitment to public good by seeking to report truth and to report it accurately, the investigation and verification of facts of a matter, not neglecting the independence of not only the journalist but also their organisation becomes significant in the reporting of corruption news. Likewise, for the efforts of anticorruption agencies to become more productive, the need to cultivate solid relationships with the media developing a proactive and well-thought-out media strategy becomes important. To achieve this, such agencies must consistently demonstrate "transparency, accountability and openness in how they communicate" (Byrne, Arnold, and Nagano, 2010, p.35).

Government officials and agencies are not the only parties that are guilty of concealing information. Access to information in the public sector is also problematic, according to interview respondents. Such organisations include banks and other public institutions that do

not cooperate with journalists to uncover corrupt practices or provide documentary evidence to support claims in a corruption story. As Chief indicated, “*you need documents to authenticate stories, otherwise how do you free yourself from legal issues? So, it is very difficult to get institutions to cooperate with you when you are doing corruption-related stories . . . In Nigeria, it is difficult to get documents to back up claims; people make claims but ask them to bring documents to back it up, they will develop cold feet.*”

Journalists and editors recognise and often evaluate matters from a Western standpoint, as they tend to agree that Nigeria is “virtually a closed nation.” This explains the failure of the Freedom of Information Act to make public information more readily available. As David argued,

The [Freedom of Information] Act allows us to sue [public agencies], but we have limited resources to pick agencies to court to compel them to disclose certain information; most often, they prefer to conceal information than to open up. Even the society does not appreciate what the press is doing; they will say every time, you will be hearing ‘billions,’ ‘billions’ . . . they will not even share the money with us. Is it every time you must be reporting corruption?”

The latter part of the quotation clarifies the attitudes of Nigerians towards the anticorruption crusade. This also is an important consideration in the interplay between culture, corruption, and press freedom. Development scholars Bamidele, Olaniyan, and Ayodele (2016, p.116) affirmed that “corruption has never been part and parcel of African culture” due to the severe consequences of corrupt acts. Punishments included “banishment, excommunication, exiling, expulsion, or outright extermination.” The authors concluded that the collapse of cultural values contributed to the “promotion of the wealthy, which, most often of the time, are public officials” (p.119). Some participants expressed frustration with the number of corruption cases that end up being dismissed by the courts due to substandard prosecution on the part of law enforcement agencies. According to one participant, “*the poor prosecution of corruption cases by the EFCC has made prior media reports on corruption allegations to become media sensationalism.*”

Participants recognised that the next logical step to reduce their excessive dependence on government officials or agencies would be to independently pursue and conduct investigations on corrupt acts and report them in accordance with the watchdog function of journalism. However, they drew attention to the following challenges in the coverage of corruption stories:

1. Time and money
2. Political imperviousness
3. Legal restrictions and security threats

9.8.2 Time and money

As Usman noted, *“A lot of us have many beats, so what you do is, as it breaks, you report. But to have that time to start following up on a story to see to its conclusion . . . we don’t have that luxury.”* Lere of the *Daily Trust* observed, *“That is why you see most times, after the first reporting, and the second reporting, nobody bothers . . . another scandal comes out and you forget about that other one.”* Thus, interviewees noted the tendency towards superficial reporting on corruption not only due to limited resources but also pressure on journalists to submit stories on time. Adebani (2013, p.87) related this to the Nigerian media’s failure to devote attention to *“painstaking long-term struggles.”* According to Adebani,

the Nigerian press is more skilled in fighting, or fighting against episodic challenges . . . than the long-term, epochal battles that privilege the fundamentals of social, political, and economic transformations beyond their immediate or short-term logics, dynamics, and parameters.

Because this episodic reporting tends to hold greater appeal to readers entertainment value, and fulfil the news media criterion of news selection, the dots connecting the anticorruption efforts which the public needs to know might remain untold.

Beyond this, the pressures of time and money, which are linked to the maximisation of profits by media organisations, may impact support for anticorruption investigations. According to

media managers at the five out of six mainstream newspapers examined in this thesis, the largest advertisers are the government and government agencies at both the federal and state levels, followed by corporate organisations and individuals. On the topic of media sustainability and the need to innovate and introduce measures that transcend the traditional market model of advertising, Baba, the publisher of *Premium Times*, indicated that the online newspaper had adopted a “mixed model” in which advertising constituted only around 30% of its revenue:

We have invested earlier on in data, so data in all its dimensions—aggregation of data, the renewal or the transformation of value on data, a lot of things like this . . . data archiving, data transformation, we do a whole lot of work in the area of data . . . but again, we are also a not-for-profit newsroom, as I mentioned earlier, which helps us to seek purposeful grants. We entered into partnership with development organisations, and they help in funding some of our programmes. For instance, our health programme is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and some of the accountability in the war against terror is funded in part by the MacArthur Foundation; our work against fake news and things like that are also funded by both the McArthur Foundation and the Open Society Institute. So, a good number of our work is supported by not-for-profit funding. So, if you ask me then, I will say that rather than advertisement, we have a mixed model financial architecture which comprise of advertising, not-for-profit funding, investment in data, events planning. We also promote events, like we promote the National Health Dialogue, we bring a lot of players in the health sector, we have something comparable in agriculture, too, where both local and international organisations come to discuss the future of agriculture and things like that, through which we make a whole lot of money. Then, we publish books; some of our books have done very well.

Western media outlets are often criticised in Marxist circles for the tremendous influence wielded by advertisers in determining the content of newspapers, as indicated by Fourie (2004). However, as he noted, these allegations of flagrant manipulation which might lead advertisers to pull their ads from the medium are “somewhat exaggerated.” Nevertheless, Fourie argued that “advertisers are guilty of subtle or indirect manipulation or influencing of news content” (Fourie, 2004, p.180). Moreover, works by scholars such as Picard (2004) and Witschge and Nygren (2009) emphasised the implications of “turbulent markets,” which gradually limited journalists’ autonomy in the coverage of corruption. This may explain journalists’ disincentives to pursue and investigate corrupt practices in society, particularly mainstream journalists.

and leave APC.” This reinforces the skewness of the anticorruption crusade, which results in cyclical allegations of vendetta and accusations of hypocrisy on the part of the government.

However, the assumption that media freedom would guarantee high-quality democracy is not necessarily correct, although it tends to improve journalists’ trust in institutions (Hanitzsch and Berganza, 2012). Similarly, Hamada, Abdel-Salam, and Elkilany (2019:305) drew a distinction between press freedom and corruption. Examining the relationship between these two concepts, they argued that it was not enough for a democratic society to have a free and independent press to curb corruption; rather, ensuring that anticorruption efforts are complemented by vertical and horizontal accountabilities is far more significant. According to the researchers, vertical accountability “fosters the right of the people to punish corrupt officials by not re-electing them” and horizontal accountability “enables other autonomous powers such as the judiciary or legislatures to check malpractices in other branches of government.”

This was also exemplified in a study on governance conducted by Hassid and Brass (2015), who examined how corruption scandals in the media were treated in two different continents: Asia and Africa. For instance, a notable difference between China and Kenya is that, while China is an authoritarian state, Kenya has a democratic government with a free media. The researchers established that, contrary to the popular assumption that a democratic government was more likely to respond to public pressure, China was more responsive to public pressure to address corruption scandals than Kenya, which ignored the obvious. Therefore, the authors emphasised the importance of political will in the fight against corruption. Furthermore, they proposed that “efforts to reduce scandal rates-particularly corruption scandal-might best be targeted at enforcement mechanisms and incentives, rather than at wholesale change of electoral structure” (Hassid and Brass, 2015, p.342). This raises the next challenge in journalists’ coverage of corruption: legal restrictions and security threats.

9.8.4. Legal restrictions, security threats, and the activities of rogue political actors

Legal restrictions and security threats were others challenge cited by participants in the coverage of corruption, as many respondents identified the risk of incurring libel suits. According to Deji, stories on corruption will lead to legal issues if they are not backed by documents or facts: “*When you get a document about a particular person or organisation, you have to double-check to make sure that the documents are genuine, and they are factual and that they emanated from the organisation that they say they have come from.*” Although the Constitution of Nigeria recognises the role of mass media in holding the government accountable,²⁵⁸ as previously mentioned, it would seem as if these guarantees were offered journalists with a right hand but are then simultaneously withdrawn by the left hand of rogue agents of state. For example, two interviewees from *Premium Times*, Baba (the publisher) and Chioma (a judicial correspondent), were arrested by the police on the orders of Nigerian Army leaders for criminal defamation in 2017. Chioma had reported that the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) was set to investigate Nigeria’s chief of army staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, over allegations of false declaration of assets.²⁵⁹ Although Baba and Chioma were later released after the case was dropped, as the police had enjoined *Premium Times* and the military to resolve the matter out of court, the online newspaper responded to the allegations by stating that it stood firmly by its story and asked the military to apologise for threatening the publication and its journalists.

²⁵⁸ For example, Section 22 of the Constitution of Nigeria recognises that the “press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.”

²⁵⁹ See Okakwu, E. (2016) “Bureau to investigate Army Chief Buratai for alleged false asset declaration’ Premium Times, 12 December 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/217682-bureau-investigate-army-chief-buratai-alleged-false-asset-declaration.html>; also See Ibekwe, N. (2016) Premium Times replies Nigerian Army, demands apology from Buratai, others’ Premium Times, 12 January 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/220279-premium-times-replies-nigerian-army-demands-apology-buratai-others.html>; Ibekwe, N. (2017) “Nigerian Army vows to charge Premium Times for “fraudulently obtaining’ military information’ 23 January 2017, Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/221344-nigerian-army-vows-to-charge-premium-times-for-fraudulently-obtaining-military-information.html>

In addition, a journalist from *Daily Trust* asked an ex-minister questions related to accountability. The ex-minister responded by launching invectives and intimidating the reporter,²⁶⁰ who was forced to apologise. Similarly, Chief from *The Nation* recalled his experience of reporting on a corruption matter involving a notable lawyer, J. K. Gadzama, who had reportedly been paid nearly 950 million naira²⁶¹ for doing nothing:

I reported it, and he took me to court. My company paid so much. I also parted with my hard-earned money. Eventually, I won the case, but it took almost two or three years. So even the legal factor is also a major constraint. Those who steal, those who loot the treasury even after knowing that they did the wrong thing, they will still go to court and say we are trying to spoil their names. So, the fear of libel, especially how to fund a libel case does not make most newspapers to pursue exclusive stories on corruption . . . Investigating corrupt practices, the gestation period is always longer . . . Most newspapers do not have investigation desks. Where they have, they do not fund it. You need the resources to fund such, and what Premium Times does with other . . . we should have even formed a consortium; a consortium of newspapers should have come together to fund common investigation, but we have a challenge. We see ourselves first of all as competitors, no newspaper wants to collaborate with another newspaper to do joint investigation, so we are just on our own. Most often., even among your colleagues in the newsroom, the one who is exposing corruption is not loved. They will grumble—is he the only in charge? Must he write it? The story that we should have used to make money, why is he writing it?

These stories illustrate the contempt that rogue political actors have for journalists and journalism; they treat journalists with disdain and view them as the wretched of the earth due to poor pay, low self-esteem, and job dissatisfaction. Furthermore, they do not believe that journalism is a profession and perhaps may not even measure up to the status of a vocation as a career. Notably, when asked about constraints in the coverage of corruption, participants often cited the tendency of political actors not to take journalists seriously, as they often hijacked conversations about the role of journalism in society to suit their political goals, couching their narratives in terms of “national security” or the “unity of the country.” It is also

²⁶⁰ See “Fani-Kayode assaults Daily Trust journalist for questioning tour funding’ Daily Trust TV 25 August 2020, Retrieved from <https://dailytrust.com/fani-kayode-blows-after-question-about-tour-funding>; Also See Ukpogon, C. (2020) “Journalist attacked by ex-Minister Fani-Kayode, speaks on ordeal’ Premium Times, 25 August, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/410687-journalist-attacked-by-ex-minister-fani-kayode-speaks-on-ordeal.html>

²⁶¹ See “PHCN Contract: Court dismisses Gadzama’s libel suit against The Nation’ The Nation, 12 February 2018, Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net/phcn-contract-court-dismisses-gadzamas-libel-suit-nation/>

important to mention that political actors also enjoy some measure of protection under the law. For example, the immunity clause is a legal provision²⁶² in the Constitution of Nigeria that protects some categories of political actors from civil or criminal prosecution during their tenure of office. As Niyi commented, “*these politicians sometimes engage in deceit; they attack and call journalists names and often use online warriors²⁶³ to defend their corrupt acts.*” In Nigerian parlance, “online warriors” refers to social media influencers. Researchers have defined them as “a new type of independent actor who are able to shape audience attitudes through the use of social media channels in competition and coexistence with professional media” (Garcia, Daly, and Sanchez-Cabezudo, 2016). This aligns Vaidya’s (2005, p.668) assertion that

unless the evidence released by the media is fully compelling, the public may have limited means to discern the truth of allegations, since, despite the publicised evidence, a government typically has the ability to initiate its own publicity campaign aimed at justifying its actions and discrediting the media’s charges.

Evidence from interviews also suggests that participants were somewhat unsure about how far their media organisations were willing to back or defend them in times of crisis or during run-ins with politicians over the coverage of corruption stories. A possible explanation for this uncertainty is political influence. As one participant explained, “*it depends on the owners who have got friends . . . the owners influence a lot, because they decide to a large extent how the story goes and even if it goes, the kind of angle it will take.*” Another participant noted,

I wrote a story recently and one of the new ministers under Buhari had to approach my managing director. He did not say we should not use the story, but that it should not be on the cover—a corruption story! It is a different ball game in the Western world. You are a star if you expose corruption. Here in Nigeria, you are derided.

²⁶² Section 308 of the Constitution of Nigeria states that “no civil or criminal proceedings shall be instituted or continued against a person to whom this section applies during his period of office.” The officials referred to in this clause include the president, vice-president, governors, and deputy governors.

²⁶³ The term “online warriors” usually refers to social media influencers on Twitter or Instagram. These influencers have a large number of followers and are unabashed in the Tweets or information that they post, which are often motivated by partisan interests. Social media influencers are often employed by politicians to smear or discredit their political opponents.

Adrian Hadland (2015) theorised that such invasiveness was an underlying feature of the “acquisitive state”: “until the national discourse has been curtailed, dissipated or managed in a way that substantially limits criticism and shields state activities, constant measures will be taken to ensure the media are brought to heel” (2015, p.14). This understanding aligns with Pierre Bourdieu’s (2005, p.30) observation that it is only by analysing and apprehending “invisible structures” such as this that can one accurately interpret and understand media outputs, whether in print or electronic form (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Thus, in navigating challenges, journalists and editors tend to exercise caution in the production of corruption news stories rather than rely on their professional ethics to serve as a check or control on abuses. The next section addresses the final research question, which concerns the impact of media ownership on the coverage of corruption.

9.9 Impact of media ownership on the coverage of corruption

9.9.1. Historical overview of media ownership and power

In media and communication scholarship in Nigeria, the concept of media ownership is usually associated with power or influence over print or broadcast content. This can be traced to British colonial rule when Nigerian nationalists deployed newspapers to agitate for independence. Under military rule in the 1960s and 1970s, newspapers and state-run radio and television stations were established in different states to elicit support for the military government. At the time, the Nigerian media was described as “slavish and virtually sycophantic mega-phones of the government or of the party in control” (Ayodele, 1988, p.110).

Around the early 1980s, a new crop of highly educated journalists began to emerge. They set out to challenge the culture of subservience within the mainstream media and promote the return to democratic forms of governance. Private newspapers and magazines such as *The*

Punch, *The Guardian*, and *Newswatch* were established around this period and led by this new wave of journalists.

By the early 1990s, the broadcast media landscape began to open up to private ownership. However, the military government preferred to grant broadcast licenses to allies and associates. Internet penetration in the mid-1990s and its incursion into the mediasphere also introduced new dimensions of media ownership in Nigeria. It enabled not only traditional owners of legacy media but also citizens who operated various blogs. However, this study does not consider government-owned media organisations partly because it is assumed that the government, as an interested owner, would naturally seek to overtly affect the public's understanding of its anticorruption efforts. Moreover, except for a few media outlets such as *The Herald* of Kwara State and the *Nigerian Observer* of Edo State, state-owned newspapers across the country mostly folded after their peak in the 1970s and 1980s.

9.9.2 Ownership impact

For the current study, the researcher asked private media owners and top management executives to explain how ownership conferred power and clarify how powerful media owners are. According to Esther, the chairwoman of *The Punch*, “*Media ownership gives the power to be heard in effecting far-reaching changes through engaging reports for society's benefit. That said, the powers of media owners ultimately lie in the ability to serve as the nation's conscience amid pressing challenges, flagrant excesses, and inefficiency.*” Baba, the publisher of *Premium Times*, also emphasised the influence of ownership on the editorial direction of newspapers. Relating this to how journalists cover corruption stories, he maintained,

We are by ourselves clear, and it is very clear in the mission statement [of Premium Times] that we will be an anticorruption newspaper and secondly, we have indicated clearly that we want to be an accountable media organisation, that is, a media that promotes accountability and to hold people in power to account and we know that to be able to do this, we have to deploy specific tools that enables you to do it and if you

see many of our own reporting strategies, you will find out that we are an investigating reporting newspaper and a lot of the things we investigate have been cases of corruption.

Chief from *The Nation* described ownership as a global challenge: “*Even in the United States and anywhere in the world, the ownership influence is always there.*” However, he said the following about the proprietor of his newspaper, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, who also owns other media organisations such as TVC Lagos: “*I would not deny that, but on a scale of preference, I think the ownership structure in terms of our newspaper, the way it influences our own coverage, I will say about 10%. Ninety percent of the time, he gives us the latitude to report as long as we are fair.*” Paul echoed this perspective, noting that “*the owner’s interest is paramount in my society.*” Bello of *Daily Trust* said,

All owner-managers have now exited the company, so it is now being run by professionals. But even before then, since its inception, Daily Trust editorial coverage has always been independent of any internal or outside influence. Nobody tells us what to or not to cover. Our owners and other management staff only wake up with our content like any other reader.

The participants also tended to allude to events at other media organisations before referencing the situation at their own establishments. For instance, when asked about the impact of ownership, an editor at *ThisDay* pivoted to Tinubu’s *The Nation*. He indicated that corruption allegations against Tinubu’s associates, such as the minister of the interior, Rauf Aregbesola, and the governor of Osun State, Adegboyega Oyetola, “*can never be published in The Nation.*” He continued,

Even if Oyetola embezzles all the money in Osun State, you can’t see it published in The Nation. Even if you see it in ThisDay, you cannot see it in The Nation. You can see it in one or two other papers, but The Nation will not carry [the corruption story]. In our own case, if it is Bukola Saraki of Kwara State, you cannot get to see it in ThisDay because Saraki and my chairman,²⁶⁴ they are best of friends...

²⁶⁴ The “chairman” refers to is Nduka Obaigbena, publisher of *ThisDay* and owner of Arise TV. He is also president of the Newspapers’ Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN). He once contested a legislative seat under the military government led by Ibrahim Babangida.

Another journalist, also from *ThisDay*, corroborated this fact: “*I know some stories that would never be published in ThisDay depending on who is affected. For example, if anything affects Abba Kyari²⁶⁵ now, he is a friend of the house, it will never be published in ThisDay.*” He elaborated,

Owners influence newspapers because they try as much as possible and cover for their friends and you never can tell. Maybe that the money that a governor stole, maybe in one way or the other, my publisher benefited from it, but I do not know. You know that is how it works. You know when Dasuki was national security adviser to [President Goodluck] Jonathan, you saw what he did. He shared money among newspaper publishers, that is how some of these big men collect money and when they collect money like that, they do not even want you to report it.

Another participant, Musa from *Daily Trust*, averred that “*this exists but not high. But when this interest is brought in the context of ethical standard of balancing stories even where facts are clear, then those stories lacking such balancing or fair hearing presents a good excuse not to see the light of the day. It is the duty of the journalist to ensure due diligence before filing their stories.*”

However, a common view among journalists and editors, particularly those from *The Punch* and *Premium Times*, was that that ownership had not at all hindered their coverage of corruption-related news. As George noted, “*In The Punch, I have had the freedom to write largely because the organisation is not owned by any politician and is not affiliated with any political organisation.*” His colleague, Ayo, said, “*Media ownership does not in any way affect the coverage of corruption in that throughout the period of participating in the editorial meetings, there was no single occasion that we were asked to drop a story relating to corruption.* Uche commented,

One thing with The Punch is that the owners are not politicians, and Punch is an organisation that if a reporter resigns to go and take up a political appointment, you cannot return. So, we are free from these encumbrances. We are not obliged to any political party. We share that popular saying: “we belong to everybody, and we

²⁶⁵Abba Kyari was a highly influential chief of staff to Buhari. He died of COVID-19 complications in April 2020.

belong to nobody; we have no friend we have no foe. Our own is to defend the institution.

A variety of perspectives were expressed by the leaders of media organisations interviewed in this research. Contrary to the impression created by officials of the Buhari government that the media worked with members of opposition to undermine the government's anticorruption efforts, media establishments actually supported the anticorruption war. As Esther argued,

Our newspapers hold journalism ethics in the highest regards. This principle underscores the essence of our reportage and conduct. We avoid media trial of individuals facing corruption charges. We dig deep and present facts from all the sides. This is the template and highly reflects in the way our journalists cover cases on corruption.

Punch is a leader in investigative reportage and media activism. The newspaper has acquainted itself very well in this regard and played key journalistic roles in the fight against graft to create the Nigeria of the dream of every Nigerian. It has done extremely well in this regard, but there's room for improvement.

Azeez, Niyi, and Chioma also said the same of their publication, *Premium Times*, in their discussions with the researcher. They held that the online newspaper provided them with a platform to publish investigative work. According to Chioma, “*the organisation stands against corruption and encourages exposure through exclusive investigations and publications.*” The leadership of *The Punch* and *Premium Times* shared the belief that their role as media owners had positively influenced journalists' coverage of the government's anticorruption efforts, as it contributed to proper monitoring and reporting on the abuse of power by political elites. As Baba from *Premium Times* noted, “*We really are distasteful of routine reporting. We think reporting must as a matter of fact, provide investigative and evidential basis or support for all the claims that they make . . . that I will say, makes us a departure from the mainstream reporting culture.*”²⁶⁶

Samson from *The Nation* said,

²⁶⁶ Interview with researcher on October 5, 2019

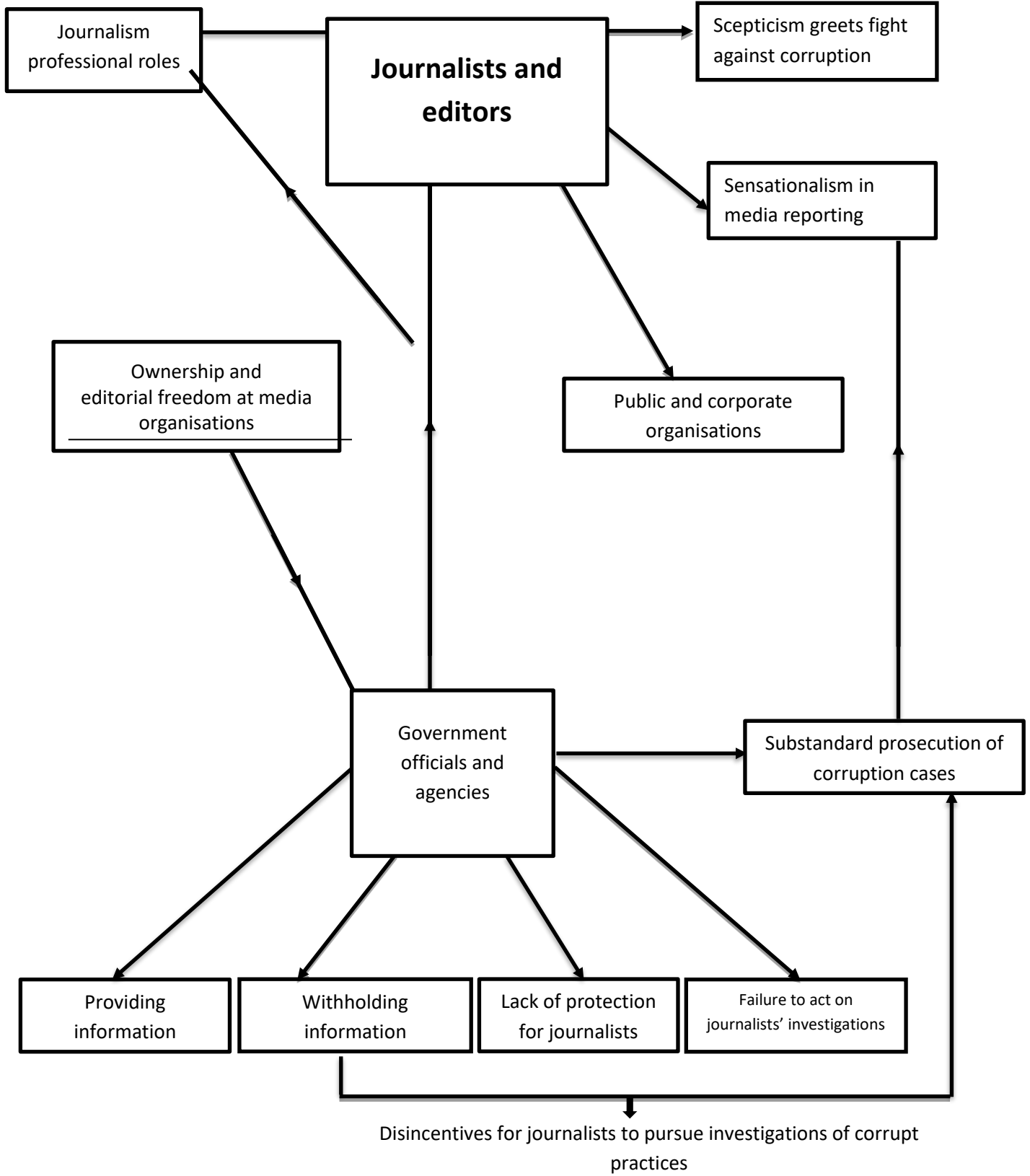
If you ask anybody in Nigeria today, The Nation is the only newspaper in the vanguard of the anticorruption agenda of the government, we are, apart from another online medium, Premium Times. But for the traditional media, we can beat our chests that we are leading . . . in fact recently, former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, declared The Nation as a wing of the EFCC. So, you can see the extent to which we have been recognised, they essentially call us the extension of the EFCC.

He continued,

We are more or less like a first-choice newspaper of the president, because we are always in the vanguard of the anticorruption war . . . most people find it difficult to believe that we are leading the anticorruption war because they assume that our publisher is a corrupt politician, I mean Bola Tinubu, but he gives us absolute freedom; he doesn't interfere, even if they are stories that affect his friends.

Musa from *Daily Trust* said that his counterparts at southern mainstream newspapers sometimes found it difficult to accept that *Daily Trust* could adopt a critical stance towards Buhari, who is a northerner, which is contrary to the politics of ethnic solidarity. Of *Daily Trust*, he said, “*we say it as it is, because we want to hold government to account, and we do not want to be the megaphone of such politics.*”

9.9.3. Main findings on journalists' coverage of corruption stories



Journalists and editors: These are media professionals who are cognisant of their role in society. Primarily, they understand that they must fulfil a watchdog role and provide information to members of society, which will strengthen democratic governance (depicted by left box). They call attention to acts and allegations of corruption perpetrated by political actors, incorporating a wide range of perspectives to shape the discourse on political corruption and the anticorruption war. These actions are central to ensuring a healthy democracy in the public sphere. At the same time, journalists and editors (as indicated in the right box) are often sceptical of the government's anticorruption efforts, although they agree that corruption is a major problem in Nigeria.

Often, they use sensationalism in media reports about corruption. More importantly, they rely on government officials and agencies to provide them with information on and authenticate claims about corruption issues. In addition, they establish ongoing relationships with these agencies to ensure ready access to information that can be used to produce news. Patterns of framing in these news items were explained in the preceding chapters ²⁶⁷of case studies employed in this thesis. The identified frames were democracy/rule of law, witch-hunt, morality/hypocrisy, judicial, disaffirmation, defence/excuse, and corruption. Nevertheless, in the production and reporting of corruption stories, some journalists and editor err on the side of caution due to concerns about libel, security, and intimidation by rogue political actors.

Media ownership and organisations: Journalists and editors interact with the leadership (media proprietors and top management staff) of their respective media organisations, who determine, either directly or indirectly, the degree of editorial freedom that they possess to write corruption stories. In other words, ownership determines the degree of freedom that journalists and editors enjoy in the framing of corruption stories. Media proprietors and

²⁶⁷ Please see chapters 5, 6, and 7.

organisations also have a complex web of relationship with government officials and agencies with regard to corruption issues. Often, media organisations do not devote enough resources to journalistic investigations. This is coupled with allegations of poor remuneration for their employees.

Public and corporate organisations: Banks and other institutions may or may not cooperate with journalists and editors in the coverage of corruption stories, although they rely on them to burnish their image. These actors may also restrict journalists' access to information, particularly in the authentication of investigative reports on corruption. In addition to government agencies, public and corporate organisations are a huge source of revenue for advertisements in the mainstream and online media in Nigeria. By not advertising with media organisations, public and corporate organisations may also collaborate with government officials to deny them revenue. A recent example is the defunct *Next* newspaper founded by Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Dele Olojede, which was crippled by government officials' subtle blackmail of newspaper sponsors and the withdrawal of advertisements, which *Next* had financially depended on.

Government officials and agencies: Government agencies are the policy makers. On one hand, government officials and agencies strive to communicate their priorities to journalists and editors by providing them with access to newsworthy corruption issues. In turn, journalists and editors act in the interests of the public by providing extensive media coverage on these issues in their newspapers. Government officials and agencies read the outputs produced by journalists and editors, keeping up with news even across social media platforms. They announce plans about how the government intends to prosecute individuals indicted for corrupt acts, which becomes further fodder for media attention. Moreover, they may anonymously offer information to journalists that may be considered prejudicial in corruption trials.

On the other hand, government officials and agencies may choose to withhold information from journalists and editors. They may also refuse to confirm information, bar journalists and editors from covering corruption issues, and threaten and intimidate them with arrests. In court, the substandard prosecution of corruption cases by government officials and agencies often leads to prior media reports on corruption allegations becoming media sensationalism, which is commonly referred to as a “media trial” in the public sphere, especially in cases in which a political actor who was accused of corruption is released or there is no clear resolution.

9.9.4. Assessment of journalists’ reporting on political corruption by journalism experts in Nigeria

The aim of this section is to draw a link between the media industry and academia. The assessments of academics are captured in the following passages.

According to Professor Ralph Akinfeleye, the media—particularly privately owned media organisations²⁶⁸— have “*established good reportage of fair, accurate, objective, and balanced coverage.*” However, he added that “*some of the reports are not in terms of the way we would like in terms of depth. There is need for more investigative journalism.*” According to Professor Akinfeleye, “*journalists are a little bit very careful and very circumspect so that they do the right thing*” due to high risk for journalists who cover corruption. Thus, journalists tend to be cautious when reporting corruption. This was reflected in interviews with journalists and editors, who underscored the importance of concepts such as balance and the authentication of claims in corruption reporting to avoid libel suits. Therefore, Professor Akinfeleye submitted that there was a need for “journalism of conscience” rather than “cocktail journalism or

²⁶⁸ The privately owned media organisations are also the mainstream newspapers considered in this thesis. Here, Akinfeleye sought to highlight the discrepancy between the coverage provided by the government-owned national television, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and other privately owned national broadcast stations such as Channels television or Arise TV.

protocol journalism” in the coverage of corruption issues in Nigeria. He defined protocol journalism as journalism powered by government officials:

They see the truth, they say it is not true, they see what is black, they say it is white, and they conceal information and delay process of information and hoard information, and in protocol journalism, they act like civil servants. That is not what we are taught in the newsroom. So, we need to put more emphasis if we are going to cover corruption, on the practice of journalism of conscience rather than cocktail journalism or protocol journalism, or “yes sir,” “yes sir” journalism.

Professor Lai Oso argued that most stories were driven by government anticorruption agencies, which journalists relied on. This implied that

we do not really have a lot of investigative stories that are really initiated by journalists, so the popular thing in Nigeria is that there is a lot of media trial. The government agencies more or less set the agenda for corruption stories and for the public, so they provide most of the stories and if you look at it from court decisions, it is like a good number of these stories end up being thrown out of the court, and that has really affected the credibility of the fight against corruption in the country. I think that is a major implication and there is a lot of mistrust on government, also.

Oso’s recognition of distrust in the government helped to contextualise the scepticism surrounding how journalists and editors interviewed in this study perceived the government’s anticorruption efforts. In addition, the issue of public trust is related to political performance. In a 2012 study, based on interviews with 2,000 journalists from 20 countries, journalism scholars Hanitzsch and Berganza examined how journalistic attitudes affected the level of trust in public institutions. An interdependent relationship exists between media organisations and other socio-political, socio-economic, and legal institutions in society; by the nature of their responsibilities, the media must work with these institutions to ensure the proper functioning of the political system. The researchers asserted that “journalists’ perceptions of public institutions may be shaped by the degree of autonomy these institutions grant to the news media” (Hanitzsch and Berganza, 2012).

They continued,

Journalists are more trusting of public institutions when their countries perform better in terms of corruption. This result is not all surprising, and it might well be attributed

to the often-privileged position of journalists who are, by the very nature of their work, usually the first to become aware of political and administrative misconduct.

Ideally, journalists should be able to conduct their own investigations to uncover and report cases of corruption, as Professor Umaru Pate reflected. However, he indicated that this is hardly the case due to the challenges of the Nigerian system, which have led journalists to rely on anticorruption agencies and the courts to obtain news on corruption.

He said,

The implication is that the media is not in total control of reporting of corrupt cases in Nigeria. Rather, they are like the conveyor belt used by these agencies to report corruption stories. The Nigerian media is not very strong in investigative journalism. Of course, they do their own kind of investigation, but mostly to softer areas that are not dangerous or that are not difficult to investigate . . . I am sure you know that investigative journalism is expensive, it is dangerous, it is risky, and knowing the kind of media organisations that we have, their investigations are of less risky nature that will not cause problems for them. So, for corruption stories, the media is not the one setting the agenda. Rather, it is the anticorruption agencies.

However, Professor Pate was quick to mention that online newspapers such as “Premium Times and Sahara Reporters appear to be doing proper investigative work than some of our mainstream newspapers.” Moreover, Professor Innocent Okoye identified issues of poor remuneration and safety for journalists who cover corruption stories. According to him, some journalists were not paid for as long as six months:

So, if anybody or even if an armed robber gives journalists money, they can do anything they like with the story. They are on the payroll of corrupt politicians, and there is nothing journalists can do. No investigation is done. Even when the investigation is done, a politician can give money and the story is thrown away. Secondly is safety of journalists. Those who are pursuing corruption stories are not safe. Investigative journalists are being killed and the culprits are not found, and journalists’ families are not protected in any way. The families they left behind are suffering, . . . you don’t expect somebody to be risking his life when the family will be left in the cold if anything happens. Many journalists were killed in the course of pursuing corruption stories, and nothing came out of it, and the families were left suffering, so even for that problem of safety, nobody is going to risk his life to do that . . . no insurance, no protection of the people who are trying to fight corruption. Corruption is very difficult to fight. Ninety-nine percent of politicians are corrupt, so who do you fight? Corruption cases are still being pursued in courts for how many years. It is a vicious circle.

Professor Bayo Oloyede reinforced this argument by recalling instances of journalists who had been killed in the line of duty, especially under military rule, and a former attorney general, Bola Ige, who was murdered in 2001 and whose killers have yet to be apprehended and brought to justice. As a result, *“nobody wants to go all out and do the work as it should be done. We have a record of such journalists that have been killed . . . anywhere such is happening, there is bound to be a kind of psychological hindrance for anyone who wants to go out and unravel corruption and begin to report it.”*

As previously noted, there seemed to be some hyperbolic descriptions of the dangers faced by Nigerian journalists. The exaggerations is similar to the fear of a child joining the army. The vision of the parent is that of a potential war casualty. The awe created by this vision cannot stop the child from joining the army. The journalists as we have seen in this study are not afraid of attack in their profession. Instead, journalists’ most potent fear was and still is litigation should the framing be fabricated. It has to be admitted that this is part of the dividend of democracy.

Professor Suleiman Salau indicated that the coverage of corruption stories by journalists is often dependent on the personalities involved in the case and the ownership of the media organisation. *“Framing depends on the prejudices of either the journalist themselves or the owner of the organisation against the person involved in the corruption case. So, framing is the way the reporter or his organisation wants the story to be perceived by the audience or by the readers. Two journalists can attend an event, but the two can take different angles in the framing of the story,”* he explained. Professor Ekeanyanwu has conducted extensive work on this area of research and shared Professor Salau’s views on the relationship between media ownership and editorial influence: *“Within the Nigerian industry, we have discovered that the ownership is basically non-professionals; politicians*

are the ones who are in charge or in control. So, these issues of corruption are being treated along party lines. Tomorrow if you are in APC or the PDP is in charge, you define corruption depending on the party where you belong and it affects the coverage that you have . . . there is a biased coverage ongoing with regards to who owns the newspapers, what are their political backgrounds, etc., all of which affect coverage; there is also issue of ethnicity.”

9.9.5. Summary of findings from interviews

The present chapter presented findings from the interviews with journalists and editors on how they report political corruption in Nigeria. Regarding their interpretation of the government’s anticorruption crusade, a significant finding was that a sizable number of participants believed that the government’s anticorruption crusade was unbalanced, a view shared with the government’s political opponents. The three case studies presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven revealed how corruption cases were intensely contested in the Nigerian mainstream press. The participants reinforced this idea during the interviews, as reported in the current chapter. In this sense, we need to know the role of the press in the media coverage of corruption. Whether or not they support corruption.

A common narrative among critics was that the fight against corruption targeted the opposition. The interviews with journalists revealed the tendency of some participants to pander to the views of the government’s political opponents, who undermined the war against corruption due to interests informed by ethnoreligious and political considerations. Thus, calling out a biased anticorruption crusade was seen as ethical in the defence of human rights and democracy.

In terms of news work, such journalists justified their position by trying to present both sides to ensure balance in stories and be seen as fair, even when it was clear that some political actors had engaged in corrupt acts. This thesis stresses the need for media practitioners to look beyond

mundane ethnoreligious and political considerations when presenting news reports on corruption. Indeed, a new government that had been in opposition for 16 years could not prove itself. Thus, it became inevitable to probe the government that had been in power for sixteen years. It would be tempting but misleading to conclude from the findings that journalists some of the time rather than act an angel advocate, do act a devil's advocate with their claim of lopsidedness of the prosecution of corruption.

In reality, this attitude of some sections of the press extends to other social menaces such as how to handle banditry in the North West of Nigeria. In order to give a dog a bad name to shoot it, the press often hides under the human rights provisions to say that the soldiers at the battleground with the bandits cannot repel the attacks of the bandits with equal force. The bottom line is that whatever will give government credit is opposed by such media organisations that toe the line of ethnoreligious and political divide.

That said, as evidenced by both the content analyses and interviews, journalists recognise their watchdog function and responsibility to keep the government accountable. However, in some contexts, journalists are seen as playing along ethnoreligious and political divide. If corruption is recognised as an issue that is associated with poverty, underdevelopment, and other ills in society, it should not be seen as being tolerated by some media through emphasis on 'wrong' government approach to it. The use of human rights considerations in the process of serving judgement to the culprits should not take precedence over serving judgement to the culprits.

The difficulties experienced by journalists in the reporting of corruption stories can be organised into two broad categories: external and internal challenges. These challenges impact the role of journalists, with consequential effects on media freedom. While external challenges are those that originate from outside of the media organisation, internal challenges are those that occur within the organisation itself.

External challenges relate to obtaining and accessing information related to corruption issues, including legal restrictions, security threats, the activities of rogue political actors, and political imperviousness on the part of the government. Media professionals were cautious about the risk of litigation, which could bankrupt a media organisation. Meanwhile, internal challenges faced included insufficient funding for staff welfare and investigative journalism and the time required for investigative reporting. Thus, it can be argued that mainstream news outlets are hindered from independently initiating investigations into corrupt acts by political office holders.

However, despite these challenges, journalism professionals recognised that they could not ignore news about corruption because they were mindful of their duties to fulfil the ideals of their profession. The assessment of their efforts rendered by journalism experts, also contributes to the foregrounding of what we understand of the media industry in the country, also validating the challenges which impact on journalists' roles in covering the war against corruption. Government spokespersons diligently conducted their duties to respond to misinformation that framings on the pages of the mainstream newspapers might contain.

CHAPTER 10

10.0 Discussion of Findings

10.1. Introduction

This chapter articulates the findings from this thesis. It examines how Nigerian journalists covered the government's anticorruption crusade, highlights the challenges involved in this endeavour, and assesses how media ownership might affect the coverage of political corruption.

10.1.1. Patterns in media coverage of corruption

During the first stage of this study, the researcher examined patterns in the media coverage of corruption-related news. This was inductively approached by focusing on incidences of corruption that occurred in the three arms of government: the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature. The analysis focused on the elements of framing, perception, news values, and news sources, which provided a holistic understanding of the scope of the research.

Seven frame categories emerged from patterns in the media coverage of corruption in the three examined cases: judicial, corruption, democracy/rule of law, witch-hunt, and disaffirmation, morality/hypocrisy, and defence/excuse. Some of the frames, such as corruption, witch-hunt, and democracy/rule of law were common to all three cases. Morality/hypocrisy and defence/excuse were two prominent frames that emerged in the budget padding scandal involving the legislature. All of these are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that journalists' framing of the issues under consideration may or may not be deliberate. Previous studies established how newspapers in other countries have adopted different framing strategies in the reporting of corruption issues in relation to their political alliances. For instance, in Turkey, Panayirci, Iseri, and Sekercioglu (2016) used inductive analysis to highlight the framing of specific issues in media reports of corruption. The identified frames were corruption, smear campaigns, tampering, sinister powers, fractures

in socio-political camps, and fabricated news. Within the Nigerian mediasphere, the news frames identified in the war against corruption are discussed below.

a) Judicial

In this thesis, the judicial frame is related to the application of the law in corruption matters. This was a dominant frame, particularly in the arms deal scandal involving Sambo Dasuki and the false declaration of assets case involving Walter Onnoghen. This frame emerged from the situational element of place in the social construction of corruption news. It concerned court proceedings, the citing of legal precepts, the granting of bails and appeals, adjournments, and judicial pronouncements on the cases. This was central in the reporting of corruption issues among all six news outlets. The coverage of procedural processes in the corruption cases could be likened to a theatre in which ordinary citizens could view those who had allegedly “sinned” against the country.

b) Democracy/rule of law

The judicial frame is closely related to the democracy/rule of law frame, which was used to emphasise the notion of Nigeria as a fully democratic country in which the rule of law was paramount, as opposed to authoritarian or military rule. This frame emerged from the idea that the sponsor of the anticorruption war—who, in this case, is personified by the Nigerian president, Muhammed Buhari—must be reminded to operate and abide by the tenets of democracy, not the dictatorship of his military past.

In other words, this frame may be interpreted as a warning to the government. *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* emphasised this frame in their news reports on corruption. However, the frame’s interpretation changed when it was deployed by *The Nation*, which used it to emphasise that “no one is above the law.” *The Nation* continually promoted the anticorruption war and

Buhari's reputation for discipline and integrity. Similarly, *Daily Trust* highlighted the president's frugality with the nation's resources, thereby deepening his reputation for integrity.

A second aspect of the democracy/rule of law frame was the suspicion usually associated with the deployment of security agencies in the fight against corruption. The actions of security agencies were perceived as not serving the interests of the public, particularly as they related to the anticorruption war. Thus, they were viewed as mere appendages of the executive branch of government, and their actions were often interpreted as intimidation or interference. As a result of Nigeria's military past, where the current president had left his footprint, these fears could be said to be justified. John Mukum Mbaku (1997, pp.112-113) linked such undemocratic practices to the failure of African leaders to "efficiently manage the transition from colonial autocracy to post independence constitutional democracy." He wrote,

Few African leaders made an effort to develop institutions of popular participation. Instead, resources were devoted to the development and strengthening of the institutions of state coercion, most of which were used to help incumbents maintain a monopoly on power. Eventually, the apparatus of state was turned into an instrument of plunder. What emerged was a corrupt patrimonial system in which resource allocation became highly politicised. (p.113)

Nevertheless, government spokespersons have had occasion to criticise media outlets for failing to see the "big picture" in the fight against corruption. The media's recourse to the safety net of democracy/rule of law (however weak) was not unexpected, as it constantly reinforced and reminded the public of Buhari's antecedents as a military dictator. Yet, as Yusuf (2011, p.82) indicated, it is ironic that the involvement of the judiciary in the "crucial anti-corruption campaign" has not yielded positive impact, as it should have:

In the Nigerian context, a salient issue that is easily missed by advocates of the over-judicialisation of the anticorruption initiative in the post-authoritarian

transition is the neglect of institutional accountability of the judiciary for its role in governance during almost three decades of authoritarian rule. The judiciary emerged from the authoritarian period as a weak institution that nonetheless had critical issues of social reform thrust before it. (p.82)

While the claim that the judiciary's weakness stems from lengthy military rule and its subjugation along the way could be conceded, it is sad that the highest judicial office should be a major actor among corruption culprits. It speaks to moral and ethical decadence and the endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria. The media has recognised that something must be done about this issue; however, there is disagreement about how to accomplish this due to different interests exhibited by journalists as highlighted in the concluding part of Chapter Nine.

c) Witch-hunt

The witch-hunt frame was a major tool employed in narratives on the fight against corruption. It was pushed by political rivals of the government. Members of the main opposition party considered it to be a "scapegoat" in the Buhari government's anticorruption war. Again, this frame was particularly used in the reporting of *ThisDay* and *Vanguard*. Readers of the two newspapers were constantly exposed to perspectives that appeared to be sympathetic to those accused of corruption. This situation speaks to the impact of the newspaper's political and ethnoreligious environment, which is the South South (where the previous president, Goodluck Jonathan, hails from).

d) Corruption

The corruption frame, which was employed by all six news outlets (particularly *The Nation*),²⁶⁹ was an explicit one that articulated the wrongdoing of influential individuals and groups in the anticorruption war. They were portrayed as greedy individuals who had

²⁶⁹ *The Nation* tended to crop out the witch-hunt frame.

taken advantage of the nation's collective wealth. This frame was used to draw attention to the problem of corruption, which spurred discussion, generated outrage, and led to conflicts between members of the political class. It was also a frame pushed by anticorruption agencies (particularly the EFCC), both directly and indirectly. The corruption frame was supported by government officials and spokespersons and those who appeared to have been marginalised by the former ruling party (i.e., the current opposition).

The corruption frame was symbolic when viewed from the perspectives of opponents of the fight against corruption. Anticorruption agencies framed individuals accused of corrupt deeds as though they were guilty of the allegations against them. This was often referred to as a "media trial." For example, the national publicity secretary of the main opposition party, Olisa Metuh, was brought to court in handcuffs because he was listed as one of the beneficiaries of the funds intended for the procurement of arms. Pictures and stories about a key figure of the main opposition party in handcuffs for corrupt acts made front-page news across several media outlets. However, this framing was not used to shame Metuh for his alleged corruption but rather to portray him as a victim of political differences. Another example was when the former chief justice of Nigeria, Onnoghen, was made to sit in the dock during his trial at the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT). This generated widespread media attention based on his geopolitical and ethno-religious background.

The corruption frame also covered instances of whistleblowing in which individuals exposed covert corrupt practices. Once exposed, the influential people who committed these acts were prosecuted. Whistle-blowers were portrayed as genuine Nigerians who acted in the interests of the public. In addition, a legal provision grants a handsome reward to whistleblowers if a lead results in the return of funds to the government. Under this

frame, whistleblowers were seen as the few good people among many bad ones and thus worthy of protection.

The case involving a lawmaker, AbdulMumin Jibrin, who revealed details of the budget appropriation process, is a good example. The corruption frame was a powerful one in that it was competitive. This is because, depending on their level of power, social actors involved in corruption tried to delegitimise their opponents in the discourse on corruption and the anticorruption war. As a whistleblower, Jibrin drew attention to wrongdoing in the budgetary inflation process, also known in local parlance as “budget padding.” Through the media, he stated that he decided to become a whistleblower to demonstrate his loyalty to Buhari and bolster support for his anticorruption war.

e) Morality/hypocrisy

The morality/hypocrisy frame was more implicit than explicit in coverage of corruption and the government’s anticorruption efforts. Social actors accused of corruption tended to rely on this frame to solidify their position or question the motives of their critics. The researcher also found that this frame particularly resonated with journalists who produced corruption stories, a stance that is often perceived as antigovernment. However, *The Nation* tended to defend the government’s anticorruption strategy more than any of the other news outlets. As one of the editors told the researcher. He noted that *Premium Times*, an online newspaper is next only to *The Nation* are vanguards of anticorruption campaign in the Nigerian media.

The Nation’s position aligned with the fact that the owner of the newspaper was the national leader of the ruling All Progressives’ Congress (APC). Publications from this newspaper will frame the anticorruption crusade in a positive light. *Premium Times* provided an acid test to assess the role of government in its fight against corruption. This is so because the

newspaper is totally independent of government for any sanction because it draws its resources mainly from outside Nigeria. In reality, when news reports reflect morality/hypocrisy frame, readers were often exposed to views that presented the government's anticorruption efforts as biased.

This narrative, which was prevalent at the other news outlets (see Table 5 in Chapter Nine), was often promoted by partisan socio-political, socio-ethnic, and religious prejudices. The purveyors of such biases thrive on justifying the misdeeds said to have been committed by individuals who have violated norms of society by engaging in corruption. The proponents of these from among such biased groups were elites who granted their interviews to the friendly media to impugn the integrity of the war against corruption.

f) Disaffirmation

The disaffirmation frame was related to the denial of corruption allegations. It was common in the publications of *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, and *The Punch* newspapers in their reporting of corruption. This frame usually preceded explanations provided by individuals accused of corruption. Such explanations are intended to repair their negative public image. For instance, in the Dasuki arms deal case, many elites had allegedly benefited from the security funds. While some individuals denied outright that they had received any money from Dasuki (until media reports later revealed the contrary), others admitted that they had received funds but with a view to shaping the narrative to enhance their own credibility; for example, they accepted the funds for a justifiable and legal cause and thus did not violate public morality or values. The latter perspective, in the opinion of the current researcher, tended to whittle down the repugnance associated with the corruption frame. However, readers were not easily convinced, as such defences were seen as increasing the dishonesty of people who had been accused of corruption. This was correlated by the fact that Buhari won a second term more decisively in

the 2019 elections than in the 2015 elections. In 2015, he won 53.95%²⁷⁰ of votes; in 2019, he won with 56% of votes.²⁷¹

g) Defence/excuse

Disaffirmation is closely related to the defence/excuse frame. Under this frame, individuals accused of corruption articulated defences or excuses to exonerate themselves in the court of public opinion. Sometimes, they engaged public relations firms to promote their own narratives about the issue. For example, PRNigeria, a notable public relations firm, was engaged by Dasuki to promote and defend the former national security advisor's public image.

As details about the corruption accusations against Dasuki were both officially and unofficially disseminated in the media through press statements from government officials and anticorruption agencies, PRNigeria responded to them in a timely, consistent, and appropriate manner to quell negative perceptions of Dasuki and his sympathisers. By articulating the defence/excuse frame, PRNigeria emphasised in media reports that the funds in question were used to acquire weapons that were used to defeat Boko Haram in the weeks preceding the 2015 national elections, which promoted a peaceful environment for the conduct of the polls. The advocates of Dasuki in the media blamed the "western powers who denied us of the equipment and sabotage our efforts to acquire same from other sources which are reasons for some delay in delivery."²⁷² However, the public was fully aware that the money had been illegally disbursed by the PDP to fund Jonathan's reelection bid, which he lost. Had the former President won, it perhaps would have been a tall order to expose the corruptions in the Dasuki arms deal.

²⁷⁰ See <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/04/buhari-wins-by-2-57-million-votes-official-result/>

²⁷¹ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/26/muhammadu-buhari-to-claim-victory-in-nigerias-presidential-election>

²⁷² See Iroegbu, S. (2015) 'Dasuki: We acquired sophisticated weapons, silenced Shekau' *ThisDay* 7 August 2015.

10.1.1.1. Implications for theory and journalism in Nigeria

It would be misleading to conclude from this research that a specific media organisation would condone corruption as a rule. The reality is that journalists are, oftentimes, mindful of their professional ethos. It is the particular political and ethnoreligious realities of Nigeria that lead a news outlet to act in one way or another. A key theoretical implication of the findings is that journalists present corruption stories to the public using the aforementioned frames. In the process, they choose to emphasise some frames over others. In this case, this focus was on the Buhari's military past with reputation of a dictator. This would undermine his current efforts to fight corruption. This indeed is a disservice to the task against corruption.

Conversely, framing was also used to present the pervasiveness of corruption under the former ruling party (the PDP) led by ex-president Goodluck Jonathan. It is clear from this paradox that all six news outlets subtly framed the three corruption cases based on their own geopolitical and/or ethnoreligious environments (Entman, 1993; Price, Tewksbury, and Powers, 1997; Entman, 2004, Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p.143).

More broadly, this finding is relevant to our understanding of current social divisions in Nigerian society. It prompts us to question some observations based on the evidence presented in the thesis. Can it be said that the contemporary journalistic landscape driven by the South South Nigerian media with their stance of almost always criticising the government in the fight against corruption, condone corruption? Or can it be seen as merely exercising its watchdog role to keep the government on its toes?

This question can be answered in two ways. On one hand, some Nigerian media outlets could be perceived as condoning corruption because of their emphasis on procedure over substance in the corruption cases examined in this thesis. For example, in the Onnoghen case, news frames tended to emphasise wrong procedure and timing on the part of the government rather

over the act of corruption itself. Five out of six news outlets (with the exception of *The Nation*) were critical of the government's approach to the matter. They were dismissive of the government's facts, which were viewed by readers as potent. Hostile journalists see them as a calculated attempt to push the chief justice out of office on the eve of the general elections.

Although *Daily Trust* did not want to be portrayed as a "megaphone" or propaganda mouthpiece of the Buhari government, it aligned with the agenda established by southern newspapers, albeit weakly.²⁷³ This stance further testified to the domineering influence of news outlets from the Lagos-Ibadan axis in setting the agenda on Nigerian political issues. This is because newspapers from the Lagos-Ibadan axis, such as *The Nation*, *The Punch* and *Premium Times*, have been trying to maintain balance in their framing of the two other cases under examination. This was in contrast to media outlets of South ownership like *ThisDay* and *Vanguard*, which often defended the actions of indicted members of the previous government. In addition, Dasuki was portrayed by papers from the South as a northerner who was acceptable to southerners and a Muslim who was acceptable to Christians. This notion also speaks to why pressure groups such as the Niger Delta militants of the South and the secessionist group Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) of the South East questioned the government's motives in its crusade against corruption. They stridently clamoured for the release of Dasuki even though he did not hail from the south and was not a Christian.

The critical stance adopted by mainstream southern news outlets resulted in the polarisation of public opinion, which was marked by deepening of ethnic cleavages and hardening of positions. In prosecuting the war against corruption, newspapers from the South, which also defended the interests of the South East, tended to present Buhari, a Muslim northerner, as a man who wielded his political power but used it to impede Nigerian democracy through his

²⁷³ See *Daily Trust* coverage on the Onnoghen case on pp. 211 and interview on p.287

actions (and inaction). This also aligned with the idea of a parasitic north feeding on the economic resources of the South, which largely contributed to the sustenance of the entire nation. This suspicion was established in the framing of such newspaper outlets. The prejudice of ethnoreligious cleavages was carried over from the past military and democratic rules in Nigeria. The bottom line was that since Dasuki acted the bid of Jonathan, a president who was of their make and stuff, whatever corruption case against Dasuki, it was feared by such journalists that it might end up implicating their own ex-president. In a nutshell, their defence of Dasuki would be a safety caveat employed to defend Jonathan who gave approval to Dasuki.

On the other hand, nearly all newspapers (with the exception of *The Nation*) were critical of government actions, fulfilling their watchdog role by reporting on its nepotistic tendencies and holding it accountable within a democratic framework. This could be seen as a positive journalistic role. The divisions arising from the anticorruption crusade spilled over to other fundamental matters of governance, such as the effective management of the national economy and security. On social media, widening tensions between supporters of the two major political parties (also known as “zombies” and “wailers”),²⁷⁴ who traded ethnic and religious slurs (Abubakre, 2016). This prompted concern from members of the public in both print and electronic media. Supporters of the two major political parties may have also engaged in active misinformation to assert their ethnic identities, which resulted in increased tensions in the political sphere.

For instance, IPOB frequently engaged in hate speech, denigrating non-Igbo citizens by equating them to animals in a zoo. Through social media platforms, especially Twitter, members of IPOB consistently incited and taunted other users. It is worth noting that IPOB

²⁷⁴ The term “wailers” or “wailing wailers” was coined by Femi Adesina, a spokesperson for Buhari. It is social media slang to refer to critics of the Nigerian government. In turn, these critics refer to supporters of the government as “zombies.”

was able to command a shutdown of economic activities in the South East for a short period. Some citizens in the region complied with this order out of fear of being harmed by the group. The “born to rule” hegemony and power sharing²⁷⁵ associated with the north represented the other side of the debate. Violence between the nomadic Fulani herdsmen from the north and the farmers of the south as well as rifts between Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers in the north central was blamed on the government because of its “biased” president. This resulted in the stereotyping of Fulani herdsmen, who were associated with acts of criminality in mainstream news reports and blamed for civic unrest in different parts of the south and north central Nigeria. The findings reinforce Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten and Katrin Voltmer’s (2010) observations on the role of the media in shaping public policy:

Media can amplify conflict by applying techniques of sensationalization and confrontational negativity, highlighting outsider and extreme positions and overemphasizing differences of opinion, and thus making it difficult for decision makers to achieve compromises and potentially even prompting irrational overreactions. (2010, p.224)

Another significant finding from this research is that how journalism professionals contextualise the anticorruption war appeared to resonate with the frames that emerged in the reporting of corruption, particularly democracy/rule of law and morality/hypocrisy. Notably, the democracy/rule of law frame was used against the president (i.e., his non-adherence to the rule of law), which the government considers antithetical to its fight against corruption. This was evident from the framing of corruption and anticorruption in the case studies considered in this thesis. However, while the media recognised that something had to be done about corruption in Nigeria, the analysis of the three case studies in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven and interviews with journalists in Chapter Nine showed that there was disagreement about how to effectively accomplish this.

²⁷⁵ Prior to the transition to democracy in 1999, more northerners (including military heads of state) than southerners have ruled Nigeria. These leaders include Tafawa Balewa, Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Muhammad, Shehu Shagari, Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha, and Abdulsalam Abubakar.

While it is not possible to fully determine how news frames affected citizens, as this is outside the scope of this research, the results of a 2016 survey report by the Centre for Democracy and Development, an independent democracy monitoring organisation in Nigeria, showed that 84% of Nigerians demonstrated support for the government's approach to the anticorruption crusade.²⁷⁶ Indeed, Buhari won more decisively at the 2019²⁷⁷ presidential polls than in 2015. All the prejudices of framing from the opposition was of no effect. Similarly, the British voted decisively for Boris Johnson of the Conservative Party from the party's slender majority in the previous administration. This was achieved on the heels of the Prime Minister Brexit campaign. It was the polarising Brexit debate used against the Conservatives by the Labour Party and the Scottish National Party that secured a landslide victory for the Conservatives. The situation is similar for Buhari, as some governors from the PDP have now joined the APC.

10.1.2. Perception

Another significant aspect covered in this thesis is patterns in the portrayal of key political actors central to the corruption issue. A summated rating scale was used to assign cognitive importance to the portrayal of key actors by news outlets. The Dasukigate case study proved useful, as the findings showed that *The Nation*, *The Punch*, and *Daily Trust* portrayed the federal government (the chief prosecutor) more positively than Dasuki (the main defendant) in reports of the scandal. This contrasted with both *Vanguard* and *ThisDay*, which portrayed the federal government more negatively than Dasuki. Of the six daily newspapers, only *Premium Times* presented a balanced portrayal of the federal government. It also negatively portrayed Dasuki in its coverage, like *The Nation*, *The Punch*, and *Daily Trust*. This finding indicates that

²⁷⁶ See CDD (2016) The Buharimeter Report, p.8 Retrieved from https://media.africaportal.org/documents/The_Buharimeter_Report.pdf

²⁷⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/26/muhammadu-buhari-to-claim-victory-in-nigerias-presidential-election>

different news outlets defend their interests based on ethnicity, political persuasion, and religion.²⁷⁸

10.1.3. News values in reports of corruption

News value is a theoretical academic concept, which journalists may or may not be aware of when presenting media reports, even if they have learned about it as part of their educational curriculum. However, news values are closely examined by journalism scholars. Based on their experiences in the news industry, Harcup and O’Neil (2001) construed news values as “ground rules that may not be written down or codified by news organisations, but they exist in daily practice and in knowledge gained on the job, albeit mediated by subjectivity on the part of individual journalists” (2001, p.261). That said, journalists recognised that news values are involved in the daily selection process, as stories are chosen based on their “value.” It should be noted that young journalists tend to be much more familiar with news values because they often hold journalism degrees and would have learned about them during their studies. By contrast, older journalists tended to have degrees in topics such as English or English literature, as they completed their studies before the emergence of journalism degrees.

In this thesis, the false declaration of assets case involving Onnoghen was used to examine patterns of newsworthiness in media reports on corruption. The news criteria that were prioritised across news outlets were prominence, institutionality, negativity/positivity, and drama/conflict. Other patterns identified in the reporting of the scandal included timeliness and consonance, impact, superlatives, exclusiveness, elite nations, social media, surprise, and audio-visuals. The prioritisation of prominence, institutionality, negativity/positivity, and drama/conflict also feeds into the morality/hypocrisy frame because of the status of the elites in the society.

²⁷⁸ Pentecostalism is significant in the circulation of narratives on the anticorruption war.

A major finding from this case study is that influential individuals and groups leveraged social fissures (e.g., ethnic and religious nationalism) to make claims about the government in the fight against corruption. Olusegun Adeniyi,²⁷⁹ a former spokesperson for the late president Umaru Yar'Adua, cited the example of James Ibori, a former governor of Delta State who boasted of his grip on the Nigerian government before his eventual conviction in the United Kingdom for money laundering. Ibori reportedly stated, "there is nowhere in the world where you help somebody to power and his reward for you is that you go to jail. It doesn't happen anywhere, and it won't begin with me" (Adeniyi, 2011, p.22). This encapsulates the pervasiveness of corruption in the Nigerian polity from 1999 to 2015.

Thus, it is possible to observe how prominent individuals and institutions, including the mainstream media, adopted positions on the Onnoghen case. With the exception of *The Nation*, the other media outlets examined in this thesis emphasised a frame that suggested a threat to democracy/rule of law rather than the acts of corruption that had allegedly been committed by Onnoghen as the nation's highest-ranking judicial officer. By contrast, *The Nation* tended to align itself with the government's position that Onnoghen should be brought to justice.

Perceptions of the morality/hypocrisy frame in this specific corruption case may be viewed as a two-edged sword, which is significant for two reasons. First, in light of Onnoghen's position as the leader of the judicial arm of government, it was held that he ought to have resigned voluntarily as is the practice in an advanced democracy. He need to do this because of his admittance of guilt by not declaring some of his assets. By not doing this, he has lost the moral authority to continue in office as the chief justice of the nation.

²⁷⁹ Adeniyi declined to participate in this research.

The second aspect (or counter-frame) relates to a double standard in the government's anticorruption war, the proximity of the elections, legal precedence, and other issues highlighted by individuals and institutions. These were interpreted as hypocrisy on the part of the government; thus, they believed that the government did not have moral authority over the case. In essence, the selection of corruption stories was driven by the actions of the government, including elites from opposition parties. This fed into frames of morality/hypocrisy and democracy/rule of law.

Based on the content analysis of newspaper articles and the interviews, it is apparent that the Onnoghen case was over emphasized by Buhari's critics in his fight against corruption. Only *The Nation* toed a line favourable to government action on Onnoghen, that an act of corruption has taken place and should not be condoned by the most senior judicial officer in Nigeria. It posited that the time and speed of his trial are not enough to impugn on the integrity of the trial. One of the top managerial staff with the *Daily Trust* made it clear in an interview that the medium followed the position of the South and other media organisations in the rest of the south to avoid being painted as a megaphone of the administration, whose leader is from the north. This reveals the extent to which mundane considerations undermine the fight against corruption. This finding also applied to the other two case studies.

10.1.4. News sources in reports of corruption

In this thesis, sources featured in the coverage of corruption were diverse, as exemplified by the Dasukigate case.²⁸⁰ Information mainly came from governmental sources, both official and unofficial. Journalists interviewed for this research also admitted a reliance on government officials for information on corruption. In the three cases studies examined for this thesis, the researcher observed that narratives on corruption were often initially voiced by confidential

²⁸⁰ See Chapter 6. Elites and institutions remain constant as sources for media outlets.

sources, then officially confirmed by law enforcement and anticorruption agencies, which were generally cited in media reports. These agencies provided information to journalists and highlighted their plans to prosecute individuals indicted for corruption. They restated the government's commitment to the anticorruption war. This practice of attributing the source of corruption news to the government agencies is germane to establish the credibility of source and employed as a safety caveat to guard against litigations from persons accused of corruption.

This source should be complimentary to the traditional investigative journalism that any of the newspapers could embark upon to probe corruption cases. The limitation of sourcing news from government agencies is that news reports are no more than reflecting or serving as mouthpiece of government. A significant aspect of confidential or anonymous sources is that they may be used to establish trends in ongoing reports of corruption; this was a pattern across the six media organisations chosen for this research. Often, these media outlets varied in their ranking of anonymous sources in reports of corruption. They designate such sources as “a highly placed source,” “a source known to us,” “authoritative sources,” and so on. On the other hand, associates and sympathisers of individuals accused of corruption might also, under the cover of anonymity, seek to discredit the position of anticorruption agencies in the discourse on corruption. Each side employed what was appropriate for it to diminish the veracity of the source of the other side.

This study reveals that the mainstream media in Nigeria plays an important role in the narration and framing of corruption and the anticorruption war. It draws attention to the fact that, despite differences in the way that media outlets reported on corruption in the three case studies chosen for the study, the identified frames consistently emerged in the coverage in two out of three cases (i.e., the Dasuki and Onnoghen cases). Although they took place under the same government, these cases are distinct from each other. The Dasuki and Onnoghen cases, which

involved a former public officer and a serving public officer, respectively, used similar frames, namely the witch-hunt and democracy/rule of law frames.

In addition, all the news outlets examined for this thesis uniformly condemned the budget padding of National Assembly members. This was because it involved representatives of all Nigerian citizens, despite differences in their religion, ethnicity, and political persuasion. This was a major finding of this study.

In this case, blame was attributed to three parties. The first was the National Assembly in its entirety, which was and is still vilified as the most corrupt assembly in the world by ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) because he failed to secure its approval to contest a third term. The National Assembly's poor image was amplified by the media at the time; it divided the blame between Obasanjo for offering bribes to legislators and members of the National Assembly for accepting them.

The second target of criticism was AbdulMumin Jibrin, who became a whistleblower after participating in acts of corruption. The third target was Yakubu Dogara, the speaker of the House of Representatives, who rallied the House to remove Jibrin as chairman of the Appropriations Committee. This case gave Buhari a respite from sustained criticism from some media outlets. Instead, they targeted National Assembly members, which in turn criticised the press for misrepresenting facts and argued that the legislative body was empowered by the constitution to consider and approve appropriations.

Legislators said that the media's use of the term "padding" in reference to the National Assembly's constitutional duty to correct and approve every budget was misleading and created disaffection among its members and their various constituencies. The ring of truth is that the Nigerian media know what is right from what is wrong about corruption cases.

However, some of them allowed extraneous matters to influence their reportage on corruption reporting.

Nigerians are largely united on national matters such as the fight against colonial rule, sports, or postindependence international politics. In reality, it was the prominence given to similar divisionist antics in Rwanda that led the country to the tribal war of ethnic cleansing. The lessons learnt from this experience led President Paul Kagame to outlaw religion or ethnicity as a form of identity²⁸¹ in Rwanda. Nigeria tried to introduce a similar measure in the last population census, which did not ask about religion as a form of identity (Idike and Eme, 2015). However, old opinions die hard, especially among the elites who benefit from divisions created on the basis of different considerations.

The arms deal scandal showed that actors in public office sometimes dispensed political patronage to select groups and networks to ensure their political survival. In this case, security funds were diverted to fund ex-president Goodluck Jonathan's reelection bid. Media reports documented that resources intended for the purchase of arms to combat Boko Haram were channelled to less noble purposes.

The false declaration of assets case revealed that different considerations such as legal, ethnoreligious, and political matters play key roles on the case. Sometimes such interests collaborated to give negative report in the media in order to frustrate the prosecution. The political and economic environment of Nigeria is a complex one due to the interplay between polarising factors such as religion and ethnicity and the large disparity between rich and poor in society. This thesis may help to identify the factors that inform the contextualisation of journalism and journalistic in Nigeria. The researcher also found that, despite Jibrin's disclosures on the budgetary process in the National Assembly in 2016 and the existence of an "anticorruption war," little seems to have changed in terms of corruption in appropriation and budgetary procedures in the National Assembly.

²⁸¹ See ABC News, 'Rwanda outlaws race-based political parties' 27 June 2003. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2003-06-28/rwanda-outlaws-race-based-political-parties/1877716>

It is important to bear in mind that, when revelations of corruption fade from the consciousness of the public consciousness without any consequences or impact, they are likely to undermine public trust in political institutions and civic participation, leading members of the public to disregard politics. Nevertheless, Howard Tumber and Silvio Waisbord previously established that corruption issues help to reveal the “gap between what is said and what things are, between idealised politics and down-and dirty politics, between the norms that are publicly legitimated and upheld and actual behaviour” to the public (2004, p.1036-1037).

Although news frames are viewed as a significant factor in media presentation to provide useful hints for members of the public to draw inferences and reach conclusions on corruption in Nigeria. This does not necessarily mean that corruption news as presented by the media, which is often indict political leaders, will be put to rational or judicious use, particularly during elections. In Nigeria, some political leaders who have been indicted for corruption still enjoy a cult following among the people. However, others do not politically survive allegations of corruption. In other words, not all politicians are equal when indicted on corrupt acts, as reflected by the media.

The next section identifies the challenges that confront journalism professionals in the coverage of corruption. It examines the impact that the ownership of a media organisation may have on the output of news on corruption.

10.2. Challenges of corruption news coverage news

Although journalists at the news organisations interviewed for this thesis reported a high level of editorial freedom in the writing and coverage of corruption news stories, the challenges that they faced in the process could be broadly classified into two categories: external and internal. External challenges are those that originate from outside the media organisation, while internal challenges are those that occur within the media organisation itself.

10.2.1. External Challenges

External challenge included access to information, legal restrictions, security threats, the activities of rogue political actors, and political imperviousness on the part of the government.²⁸² While the first three problems may lead journalism professionals to engage in self-censorship, the last challenge tends to discourage journalists from initiating investigations and reporting on corruption because they believe that the Buhari government often chooses to ignore citizens' wishes. For example, imperviousness is exemplified by the End SARS protests, which resulted in civil unrest in major cities in Nigeria. The president was implored to address the nation to calm the nerves of the restive youth. The president did not do this in time until very late in the struggle.

As is standard in developed nations, Nigeria also has legislation in place to support and guarantee public access to information. However, interview participants across the six media outlets highlighted the problem of access to information and documents for writing corruption stories. In particular, government agencies refused to provide information requested under the Freedom of Information Act, and anticorruption agencies refused to provide any information, especially when the individuals involved in a corruption case were close to the president. As journalism professionals noted, these agencies "only dish out what they want the people to know." Given media organisations' limited resources, it was an expensive venture for journalists and their media outlets to challenge failure to ensure access to information in the courts.

The challenge pertaining to access to information might be linked to the vestiges of relations between the state and the press under authoritarian military rule, particularly between 1984 and 1999. Prior to the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act, Nigeria had several draconian

²⁸² See interview chapter from p. 287

laws formulated under military rule that impacted media and journalism practice. Under Buhari's military rule in 1984, there was scarcity of newsprints for production of newspapers and other institutional measures were introduced to check the "excesses" of the press. A notable measure promulgated by the Buhari military government was Decree No. 4 (1984), also known as the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act. Under this act, both the author and publisher of a story would be guilty of an offence under three conditions: if the story was false in its entirety, if the allegations published in the story were not proved to the letter, and if the story was true but embarrassed the government. Penalties for these offences included hefty fines and up to two years of imprisonment for the journalist and the publisher.

Two journalists, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor at *The Guardian*, were convicted under this decree; the newspaper itself was fined 50,000 naira. Furthermore, the military government forbade civil servants from speaking with the press without clearance from their heads of unit. Ten years later, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha's military regime, consolidated media restrictions through series of decrees that enabled the police to arrest and detain journalists and critics for up to three months under the guise of protecting national security. In addition, newspaper outlets were directed to register with the Newspaper Registration Board for a fee within a specified period in accordance with the Newspaper Registration Law (Ogbondah, 2003, Pate, 2012).

In the pursuit of investigative stories, particularly the verification of claims, participants also mentioned that corporate organisations such as banks and other financial institutions did not cooperate with them to uncover corruption cases involving influential individuals. The EFCC also acknowledged and corroborated this, highlighting that Nigerian banks deliberately provided inadequate information or hid information to shield people suspected of financial

crimes.²⁸³ In addition, journalists are well-acquainted with the implications and consequences of libel and defamation, which has resulted in self-censorship in the reporting of corruption news. Thus, journalists are often unable to fully report corruption cases despite independently initiating investigations. In addition, their direct and indirect reliance on government anticorruption agencies for corruption stories helps them to circumvent the problem of access, credibility, and legal issues. It also helps journalists cope with the day-to-day demands of news production, which entails the reporting of multiple beats and pressure to generate content for their news outlet.

10.2.2. Internal Challenges

Internal challenges articulated by participants mainly consisted of a lack of funding and time for investigative journalism and reporting and issues related to the welfare of journalists. Issues of adequate welfare and proper remuneration for journalists remained a significant challenge in terms of coverage of corruption issues. Journalists were often owed back pay, and there was no insurance in place for journalism and media professionals. This was a major constraint and an important disincentive to the pursuit of investigative reports on corruption. Lack of proper staff welfare was inimical to the fulfilment of journalism ideals. However, participants from the media industry and academia acknowledged the leading role of *Premium Times* in producing special investigative reports on corruption issues.

This could be explained by *Premium Times*' mixed funding model, in contrast to mainstream newspapers' reliance on the traditional model of advertising from the sale of print issues. A substantial portion of *Premium Times*' funding comes from foreign development organisations such as the McArthur Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It also relies on

²⁸³ See Tukur, S. (2012) 'Nigerian banks aid corruption-EFCC' *Premium Times*, 10 September 2012. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/99682-nigerian-banks-aid-corruption-efcc.html>

data-driven digital journalism to disseminate news reports that focus on accountability, health issues, agriculture, and other issues that promote good governance in society. Other mainstream media organisations, such as *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, and *The Nation*, have also benefited from development organisations, particularly with regard to training for journalists.

In an environment where advertising revenues mainly derive from government agencies and corporate organisations, this research raises questions about the impact of the commercialisation of news products on the coverage of corruption by journalists. In other words, we need to know to the extent to which commercial or market pressures drive coverage of corruption by Nigerian journalists. This is open to debate, especially given the fact that media organisations' circulation figures remain shrouded in secrecy and that there is no reliable database for public information on this topic. While Yushau (2018) attempted to draw a distinction between poor capitalisation and corruption, Ojo (2018, p.1275) argued that, when “necessary, through the ‘invisible hands’ of market-based economies, the government leverages its advertising patronage power to marginalise and freeze out news media outlets with critical and investigative reporting.” Again, this brings to memory the story of what led to the demise of the defunct *Next* newspaper (see Chapter Three).

10.3. Impact of media ownership on coverage of corruption news

The last research question pertains to the impact of media ownership on the coverage of corruption and the Buhari government's anticorruption crusade. Top managers at the media organisations highlighted in this study believed that they have been very supportive of the government's anticorruption efforts. They asserted that the government was a beneficiary of the media's message to eliminate corruption in society because media outlets had been at the forefront of championing anticorruption through investigative news reports and editorial positions before the current administration came to power. However, these media organisations

did not follow a collaborative approach in their investigative reporting on corruption, which would have allowed for economy of scale, because they saw themselves as competitors in an industry. Although profit was expected to accrue from the commercialisation of news products, it was not forthcoming; however, some top managers at mainstream news organisations preferred to shield themselves from the “influence” of the outlet’s proprietor by asserting their autonomy, which they had been entrusted with in the operation of the newspaper.

Regarding coverage, although participants reported having the freedom to report on various corruption issues, this was subject to editorial considerations and the degree of freedom granted by proprietors. It was also found that media proprietors and their “friends” in government did impact the newspaper’s editorial direction on corruption news, whether positively or negatively, depending on the relationship between the media house and the government; this outcome was directly proportional to the degree of freedom granted to journalists in the framing of corruption stories. Journalists with more years of experience were likely to report a lower degree of freedom, while those with fewer years of experience tended to enjoy a higher level of freedom in writing stories about corruption. As a result, young reporters could convince themselves of their ability to objectively choose and interpret the news based on professional news values.

10.4. Implications of journalists framing of corruption news stories

Based on the identified challenges, the researcher found that journalists’ framing of corruption issues was based on mundane considerations such as ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation. This was dictated by the elites, who often seek to divide the citizenry for their political gain. This division is weird because members of the society had hitherto lived together in harmony though their tongue, ethnicity, and faith may differ. These ignored differences are now pronounced through framing in the news patterns of corruption to whip up emotions. Another

challenge in the pursuit of investigative journalism was the risk of litigation in reporting cases of corruption. As articulated by participants, this fear was more palpable than the fear of sanctions from the government. Thus, gatekeepers are needed in the media industry to check issues that may lead to litigation, which could negatively impact the time needed to conduct investigative journalism and a media outlet's financial resources.

In addition, two other factors may influence how journalists frame corruption stories in Nigeria. The first is the government's actions (either deliberate or unintended) in the articulation of its own anticorruption agenda, especially when the rhetoric it puts forward is far from reality in relation to the public agenda. As indicated earlier, how journalism professionals frame such issues may be deliberate to expose the actions or inactions of the government concerning such cases. Their selection of stories on corruption was partly driven by the actions of the government, especially the elite political class. Any media outlet that seeks to produce balanced reporting can hardly be blamed for drawing attention to human rights violations when the government chooses to ignore court orders related to corruption cases or when corruption cases are inadequately prosecuted and thrown out by the courts. Because of poor handling, corruption is sensationally framed by the media, to the chagrin of the government. In such circumstances, the media has a duty to report on all issues, whether positive or negative, in the fight against corruption. However, it can be argued that journalists' limited access to information has had adverse effects on the war against corruption, as this has placed the government in a defensive position in which it struggles to defend its anticorruption crusade.

The second dimension is media ownership. Interferences may be made due to political affiliations and ethnic consideration in the reporting of corruption stories. Thus, the integrity of the media may be undermined when the news is incompatible or collides with the interests of the proprietor or those of their associates and social networks. By reflecting on how *The*

Nation framed the issue of corruption in the judiciary, it can be seen that the newspaper conferred legitimacy on the government's position, thereby contributing to its political stability. This is likely because its proprietor, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, national leader of APC, is a key strategic ally of the president. He significantly contributed to the victory of the president in the 2015 general elections.²⁸⁴ In addition, it is widely held in political circles that the proprietor of *The Nation* is angling to take over from Buhari in 2023, when the president's two-term tenure will be complete and political power will be expected to shift from the north to the south.

This position aligns with an argument made by Adesoji and Hahn (2011, p.181):

The covert public persuasion method employed by newspapers resulting in discreet imposition of their ideology and position enable them to project those values or viewpoint that the owners cherish or find useful for attaining their goals while still giving the impression that they are popular outlets for the dissemination of seemingly harmless news and commentaries.

However, it is important to note that many aspects of the media system in Nigeria are currently in a state of transition. There is a proliferation in notable online news outlets driven by professional journalists, including *Premium Times*, *The Cable*, *The Whistler NG*, and *CityVoice*, which focus on the pursuit of pure journalism as opposed to citizen journalism-oriented platforms such as *Sahara Reporters*. Due to the perennial problem of poor pay and uncertain access to resources, it would appear that many journalism professionals are trying to carve out their own niche as a result of the internet and the allure of digital media ownership.

10.5. Contributions to scholarship

This thesis contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of accountability in Nigeria. By linking news framing to the anticorruption crusade, it extends framing theory beyond from

²⁸⁴ See 'Jagaban' cements reputation as Nigeria's Svengali in Buhari win' *Financial Times*, 5 April 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/6abed374-d942-11e4-a8f1-00144feab7de>
See also Chapter 3 on Political economy of the media in Nigeria, pp.102-129.

the media systems of the Global North. Prior to this research, this approach was rarely undertaken in developing nations. Moreover, the thesis significantly contributes to knowledge and understanding of the Nigerian newspaper landscape, its political economy, and variations in frames and news values employed to cover corruption, which improves understanding of the country's political culture. It also reveals the underlying problems of professionalism in Nigerian journalism.

Key participants in this research consisted of journalists who directly covered and oversaw stories about corruption and their managers at mainstream media establishments. Their insights enabled this research to contribute to the understanding of organisational forces that shape journalists' coverage of political corruption and the fight against it. The study was also enriched by the contributions of government spokespersons and journalism scholars. It deepens understanding of the socio-cultural context in which journalism is practiced in Nigeria. More importantly, it underscored and documented the role of the media in the Buhari administration's anticorruption efforts between 2015 and 2019.

With regard to the evidence generated by this study, journalism practitioners' conceptions of the anticorruption war have rarely been discussed in the contemporary literature. It is an important dimension. Moreover, this thesis contributes to research on corruption by connecting attitudinal and performative aspects of Nigerian journalists' work with the backstage news production process and routines involved in the coverage of corruption. Journalists focus on the askew nature of the war against corruption points to a shared belief or "doxa" by journalists wherein, the adversarial role is a valued and acceptable norm or standard expected of journalists (see Bourdieu, 2005, p.37). Factors such as ethnicity, religion, and personalism (reflected in the centralisation of governance and political affiliations) play out against the backdrop of a polarised political landscape. This, coupled with the manner in which media practitioners have

embedded themselves in such conversations, do not accord credence to their professed watchdog ideals in the interest of the larger public. The kernel of this thesis lies in an attempt to foreground the cliché that journalists must not be seen to tolerate corruption to prevent it from thriving in a polity, especially since citizens seem to prefer the public shaming of corrupt actors.

Whether journalists adopt an adversarial or cooperative stance towards the government in power, one element germane to their work is their cultural status, which is higher than other professions (particularly politicians) because of their access to the public (Bourdieu, 2005, pp.31&41). Therefore, the government wants the media to be on its side in an anticorruption crusade to promote its version of reality. The latter is important to the public discourse, governance, and political legitimacy.

Although Nigeria is acknowledged as Africa's largest economy, the national economy is in dire straits. The national elections of 2015 arguably reflected Nigerians' strong desire to elect a strongman who can perform, not unmindful of his antecedents as a military dictator who curtailed press freedom. The Buhari government's stated objective for its anticorruption crusade was to eliminate the old order and to improve quality of life for citizens, which can only be achieved through economic growth.

It is also an established fact that, due to the fall in global oil prices and the recession, the Buhari government has had less access to revenues from crude oil sales than any of its predecessors since the country's return to democratic governance in 1999. In fact, Nigeria earned one of its highest-ever revenues from crude oil (51 trillion naira) under Buhari's immediate predecessor, Jonathan.²⁸⁵ By contrast, the Buhari administration received 16.6 trillion during a comparable

²⁸⁵ See Ndujihe, C. (2016) 'Under Jonathan Nigeria earned N51 trillion from crude oil Vanguard. 16 August 2021, Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/jonathan-nigeria-earned-n51trillion-crude-oil/>

period.²⁸⁶ However, evidence suggests that more social infrastructural development occurred under Buhari's four years in office compared to the 16 years that the Peoples' Democratic Party was in government (1999–2015).²⁸⁷

The “blame game” is a perennial characteristic of corruption-related news. On one hand, the government, its agencies, and its sympathisers saw the negative frames in the press against its fight against corruption as encouraging corruption to fight back,. The government is of this view especially when these frames were published by media organisations that were unsympathetic to the government. Among the latter and opponents of the government, frames were intended to expose the government's apparent inconsistencies. For example, the government's broad definition of corruption was allegedly reflected in its selective prosecution of corruption or inept handling of corruption cases. Consequently, the government was itself accused of fuelling corruption. Therefore, the discourse on the “anticorruption war” was seemingly transformed into one of “corruption.”

This landscape likely shapes patterns in news coverage and political debates about the character of government. This state of affairs attracts negative news reporting on public information. To defend itself, the government employs spokespersons. The government recognises that character is an important factor in a positive public image and essential to attract foreign direct investments. Conversely, a negative public image would likely discourage investment, thereby impeding economic development.

Thus, in consideration of the tight economy of the Nigerian newspapers and in view of government attitude, it is difficult to expect the adversarial role as it should be from the press.

²⁸⁶See Eboh, M. (2019) 'Buhari administration earned N16.6trn from oil in four years' Vanguard, 15 October 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/10/buhari-administration-earned-n16-6trn-from-oil-in-four-years/>

²⁸⁷ See Munshi, N. (2021) 'Nigeria infrastructure splurge to boost economy' Financial Times, 17 February 2021 <https://www.ft.com/content/60f746ab-2763-4a0c-ae4d-6cd0d9cc5dcc>

This indeed is the primary role of journalists as mediator between the government and the public. Herman and Chomsky (2002) viewed such position of the press as somewhat impoverished on account of the huge inequality in resources between the press and government who may sanction them by not advertising in their outlets to whip them into compliance with government. This sanction hinders media behaviour and performance. This is coupled with varying degrees of press freedom in Nigeria. This paradox would not make the adversarial role of the media entirely attainable for a society like Nigeria, which has less developed market economies to withstand the sanction. This research demonstrates that there is a need to pay attention to evolve an effective and actionable role for the media to ensure that journalism practitioners can deliver on their obligation to provide balanced coverage of news, act as an unbiased watchdog, and jettison anathemas which promote division in the polity.

In an environment where citizens often abuse government empowerment measures and resources as their own share of the “national cake” that they need not bother to return, this thesis raises important questions. On whose side should the journalism professional be remains to be seen. In terms of evolving social and ethical standards for evaluating the past, journalists should show the side they take in response to moral shifts in society. Journalists need to prove that they can be neutral in their reportage of a social malaise like corruption in Nigeria. This would be in tune with libertarian adversarial stance with a development consensual approach. It would align with reinforcing government priority towards improvement of the society. It is expected that irrespective of and in spite of the government’s shortcomings, journalists should demonstrate some level of identification with the government’s fight against corruption by tempering their criticism of its other limitations as an effort to take side with the public. For example, the security challenges dwelt upon at length by the journalists can only shield the culprits of corruption from public attention on their evil deeds to the nation.

10.6. Summary

This thesis examined how Nigerian journalists frame the Buhari government's anticorruption war by focusing on patterns in media coverage and journalists' contextualisation of the government's anticorruption efforts. Furthermore, it highlighted the challenges that journalism professionals face in the coverage of corruption stories and examined how media ownership and regional, ethnic, and religious differences could impact stories.

The research was undertaken in two stages. The first stage was to analyse the content of corruption news stories in the mainstream media: five legacy newspapers and one online newspaper noted for its investigative reports. This content analyses were approached by focusing on three cases of corruption in the political system. The first case study was drawn from the executive arm of government, the second from the judiciary, and the third from the legislature. These entities were studied in-depth to inductively generate and analyse frames in corruption coverage. It was found that elite political actors accused of corrupt acts by the state tended to make deliberate attempts to fuel animosity and aggravate tensions between Christians and Muslims and between ethnic groups. The influence of religious leaders, especially Pentecostal leaders, in this context was also significant because of their ability to facilitate the agendas of the political class. The second stage of the research consisted of interviews with journalism professionals. The lacunas arising from the content analysis of the six newspapers lead to the interview section. This exercise attempts to probe further the views of the purveyors of newspaper stories on the fight against corruption.

The first research question which investigates patterns of news frames reveals that when a notable frame such as democracy/rule of law is adopted, the Buhari government may appear to be overreaching in the anticorruption war; this is a negative perspective. In the same manner, a democracy/rule of law frame may also be interpreted to mean that "no one is above the law." Thus, it would be moral for those accused of corruption to come forward and prove their

innocence. Journalists should neither use legal technicalities to excuse the culprits, nor resort to whipping up readers' sentiments based on ethnoreligious or political biases. In addition, news values that were commonly identified in the reporting of corruption included timeliness, consonance, impact, superlatives, exclusiveness, elite nations, social media, surprise, and audio-visuals. All of these were significant in the interpretation of corruption news.

The second research question focused on the challenges that confront journalists in the coverage of corruption. The identified issues were divided into two categories: external and internal challenges. External challenges included lack of access to information, legal and security considerations, the activities of rogue political actors, and the imperviousness of the government. Internal issues included a lack of funding and time for investigative reporting on corruption, difficulties related to staff welfare, and low remuneration of journalists.

The last research question examined the impact of media ownership on corruption-related news reports and the government's anticorruption efforts. Participants in managerial positions at the media organisations chosen for this study claimed that their organisations cooperated with the Buhari government's anticorruption efforts and have consistently been at the forefront of fighting corruption, even the current administration came into power. They highlighted their independence from the proprietors of their media organisations and ability to present balanced coverage of corruption. While younger journalists said that they had adequate freedom to report on corruption stories (subject to editorial moderation), senior journalists specified that this freedom was relative, as it depended on the whims and caprices of proprietors. The latter sometimes determined the level of editorial freedom permitted in the reporting and framing of corruption stories based on ethnoreligious and political sympathies.

10.7. Limitations

One limitation of this study was an inability to examine other identified cases of institutional corruption, such as those involving public sector institutions such as the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in the oil sector and individuals indicted for corrupt acts, such as David Babachir Lawal. Lawal, a former secretary to the Government of the Federation, had developed a close working relationship with the president before being fired. These cases were not addressed due to the level of detail required in a study of this nature and limited word count. In addition, the researcher was unable to ascertain to what extent does the wish to satisfy the public play in the editorial content of news about corruption. However, these issues offer fertile ground for further research on media and corruption. In addition, studies could examine how other media outlets, such as television channels, radio stations, and online publications, portray the fight against corruption.

10.8. Recommendations

10.8.1 For the Government

I. Engendering a culture of transparency and cultivating a strategic relationship with the media

An important recommendation for the government is to ensure that all agencies (especially those established to fight or prosecute corruption-related issues) are well-positioned to develop strategic working relationship with the media. Through these, they can effectively explain their work and present themselves to the public on behalf of the government. This can be achieved when information is readily available, particularly with regard to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act by journalists, civil society organisations, and members of the public. In addition, improved access to information would likely foster a culture of transparency among institutions.

Government agencies must also understand that media professionals are guided by certain criteria in deciding what information to present to the public. However, news coverage does

not always capture a complete or true picture of issues related to corruption. The results of a collaborative study conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the National Bureau of Statistics in 2019, which revealed the magnitude of bribes paid by citizens to public officials in Nigeria,²⁸⁸ underscored what appeared to be the failure of the anticorruption crusade initiated by Buhari's government. Therefore, media messages on corruption must be carefully crafted to depict which side it intends to emphasise in communicating with the public.

II. Promotion of press freedom

Nigeria is currently classified as “partly free,” according to Freedom House's 2020 Freedom in the World Index; it is ranked 47th out of 100 countries. According to the report, the nation's vibrant media landscape “is impeded by criminal defamation laws, and the frequent harassment and arrests of journalists who cover politically sensitive topics.”²⁸⁹ The current researcher believes that the Buhari government can do better than this since Nigeria is a liberal democracy. Although supporters of the government would argue that excessive liberalisation could prove costly for the country.²⁹⁰ To this end, members of the political class across all levels of governance—executive, judiciary, and legislative—must make conscious and deliberate efforts to promote press freedom and accord respect to journalists.

10.8.2 For Media Practitioners

For the greater good of society, journalism professionals have a duty to take the edges off the sabre-rattling circumstances caused by ethnic, religious, and centralised fiscal conditions and elite actors, as these detract from the key issue of making the Nigerian system work for the

²⁸⁸ See Sanni, K. (2019) “Nigerians paid N675 billion cash as bribes to public officials in 2019-UNODC” Premium Times, 7 December 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/367019-nigerians-paid-n675-billion-cash-as-bribes-to-public-officials-in-2019-unodc.html>

Also see “Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends” December 2019. Retrieved from, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/corruption/nigeria/Corruption_in_Nigeria_2019_standard_res_11MB.pdf.

²⁸⁹ See Freedom in the World 2020. ‘Nigeria’. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-world/2020>

²⁹⁰ Ochonu, M. (2020) ‘Liberal democracy has failed in Nigeria’ *Africa is a Country*. Retrieved from <https://africasacountry.com/2020/02/liberal-democracy-has-failed-in-nigeria>

majority of citizens. Admittedly, the media must also sell newspapers; as such, some reasonable level of sabre rattling should be excused.

Little can be done about media proprietors' relationship with members of the political class to further their political objectives, which may or may not be entirely altruistic. However, efforts can be made to promote journalism that serves the interests of the public. In addition, as Josephi (2012, p.474) argued, "journalism needs supporters who see value in independent information provision and credible news judgement." Therefore, it is recommended that media owners develop new approaches to funding true investigative journalism, as opposed to semi-investigative reporting or pseudo-investigative reporting, which currently appears to be "a means to an end" in mainstream news outlets that claim to conduct investigative journalism.

The ideals of journalism, as a social service reflected in the quality of news content produced by a media organisation, can only be realised when backed by proper financing or a sustainable financial model. Therefore, the current researcher recommends further research on the extent to which commercial or market pressures drive coverage of corruption news stories by Nigerian journalists. Similarly, the remuneration of journalists must also be examined as a critical matter of importance. Competitive pay is not only directly linked to higher productivity and commitment, but it would also ensure that the best minds and talents are attracted and retained by the journalism profession.

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APPENDIX

Interview Schedule for Journalism Professionals

Demographic information

Name of media organisation

- a) Employment status
- b) Job role and rank/designation
- c) Gender
- d) Age
- e) Years of experience
- f) Highest educational qualification
- g) Religious affiliation
- h) Ethnicity
- i) Political affiliation
- j) Monthly salary

For top managers and editors

1. As an editor of a national newspaper, could you please tell me how you work?
2. What is the main objective or goal of your media organisation?
3. How many copies of your newspaper are circulated per day?
4. Kindly avail me of the demographics of your newspaper.
5. What is the current reach of your medium?
6. Who are its greatest advertisers in terms of government (state or federal) and companies or individuals?
7. What do you think makes your media organisation distinct from other newspapers in Nigeria?

8. The fight against corruption is a key plank on which the Muhammadu Buhari administration came into office in 2015. Are there any corporate strategies developed by your media organisation with respect to the coverage on corruption news stories by the medium?
9. Do you think your role has an effect on the Buhari government's policies, particularly on the reporting of corruption news stories? Could you give examples?
10. How do you supervise and coordinate the work of reporters and/or other editors working under you? Could you please share what works in your organisation?
11. Could you tell me of your experience(s) in reading, evaluating, and editing news reports about corruption which are submitted to you for publication?
12. In relation to Question 9 above, do you confer with the reporter or the author of a news story about corruption with regard to changes made in content, style, organisation, or publication?
13. In what ways has the ownership of the news organisation impacted the coverage of corruption by the medium?
14. What possible challenge(s) does the organisation face in reporting corruption news under the Buhari administration?
15. On the fight against corruption instituted under the current Nigerian government, do you think your media organisation is doing enough?

In relation to Question 15 above, what more could you do?

For journalists

1. As a journalist, what role(s) do you believe are most important for you to perform in the society?
2. Do you participate in the editorial meetings of your media organisation? If yes, how often do you participate in such meetings?
4. How much of freedom do you have in selecting news stories to work on?
5. From your perspective as a journalist, what is the war on corruption under the Buhari administration? (What are those issues and ideas which fall under the label of “war on corruption?”)
6. How much editorial freedom do you have in the framing of corruption news stories that you work on?
7. What challenges do you face in reporting corruption news under the Buhari administration?
8. In what ways has media ownership impacted your coverage of corruption?