

Corruption coverage: the role of the media during Nigeria's 2019 elections

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Executive summary

This study by the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) research consortium analyses media coverage of corruption and anti-corruption efforts in a 19-month period before, during and after Nigeria's 2019 election. It builds on research conducted around the preceding vote in 2015 (Komolafe et al., 2019).

Over 3,500 relevant stories were captured from across six newspapers that were assessed to determine the types of corruption discussed, the cases or issues which most often hit the headlines and the format of reportage. Analysis of this data offers insights into how the media reports corruption around elections in Nigeria and what, if any, wider impact this has.

The 2019 data shows a doubling of corruption coverage in Nigeria since 2015 – most certainly linked to the Buhari administration's renewed commitment to addressing the issue. However, the data also points to a continued challenge around the content of coverage, which does little to analyse issues or place allegations and initiatives in the wider development context.

Individual cases – rather than articles looking to explore anti-corruption initiatives and reforms – continued to be the most reported stories, with those focusing on fraud and misappropriation being the most prevalent. We also observed that newspapers remain susceptible to political pressure when pursuing particular stories.

These issues partially explain why media reporting on corruption in Nigeria continues to have relatively little impact in shaping the anti-corruption agenda. Instead, newspapers remain focused on pursuing individuals for ill-gotten wealth, rather than on the reformation of institutions to make them more transparent and accountable.

The media can do more to push the anti-corruption agenda. Greater collaboration is needed between the media and civil society to improve citizen understanding of corruption and anti-corruption efforts, newspapers should devote more column space to analytically discuss corruption issues, and improvements should be made within the working practices of media outlets to support impactful corruption reporting around elections in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextualising corruption in Nigeria

Nigeria placed 144th in Transparency International's 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public-sector corruption according to experts and business people (Transparency International, 2019a). With a score of 27, Nigeria was five points behind the average for sub-Saharan Africa and only one point better off than it was in 2015 (*ibid.*), the year when President Muhammadu Buhari was elected with a key campaign promise to 'work to eradicate corruption' (Smith, 2015). This promise was in line with the sentiment enshrined in Nigeria's 1999 Constitution,¹ which, while failing to define corrupt practices, highlights the duty of the state to abolish all corrupt practices and abuses of power.

The Buhari administration attempted a number of steps to tackle corruption in the President's first term in office – indeed, unsuccessful approaches were also trailed by successive administrations since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. These efforts have included the establishment of a Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption, the improvement of the anti-corruption legal and policy framework in areas like public procurement and asset declaration, and the development of a national anti-corruption strategy, however such measures have yet to yield the desired results (Transparency International, 2019a).

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), established under President Obasanjo in 2003, has undoubtedly been more active under Buhari (Onyema et al., 2018), having reported 703 corruption convictions by the end of November 2018.² However, accusations remain that the government appears unable or unwilling to prosecute significant political and business actors across the political divide, focusing instead on 'netting small fish' (Campbell, 2018).

That is not to say that some progress has not been made. In a survey for the Global Corruption Barometer Africa, 59% of Nigerians felt that the government was doing well in tackling corruption as compared to 22% in 2015 (Transparency International, 2019b). However, while the number of respondents who felt that corruption had decreased in the last year stood at 43% – a significant jump from just 8% in 2015 – an equal proportion (43%) felt that corruption had increased over the same time period (*ibid.*).

¹ The 1999 Constitution (As Amended), Chapter II, 15(5) (<http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>).

² Comprising 103 convictions in 2015, 194 convictions in 2016, 189 convictions in 2017 and 217 conviction between January and November 2018 (Premium Times, 2018).

For analysts like Page (2018), corruption remains ‘the single greatest obstacle preventing Nigeria from achieving its enormous potential. It drains billions of dollars a year from the country’s economy, stymies development, and weakens the social contract between the government and its people.’ Further, a PricewaterhouseCoopers report (2016) suggests Nigeria is set to lose as much as 37% of its gross domestic product (GDP) to corruption by 2030.

Corruption is an issue that cuts across all sectors in Nigeria, including the media (Page, 2018). A 2013 study of 180 respondents from 18 media organisations found 75% of respondents were willing to accept financial gifts for their work, with low salaries cited as a significant factor in their decision (Adeyemi, 2013). At higher levels, editors and publishers often receive even bigger bribes to manipulate their coverage and quash stories that might embarrass their political patrons (Page, 2018). Subsequently, the media industry is not an independent actor in telling the story of corruption in Nigeria but is intertwined and part of the narrative itself. We consider this in the analysis of our key findings.

1.2. Nigeria’s 2019 elections

In 2015, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC) party became the first opposition challenger to win the presidential election in Nigeria since the country’s return to democracy in 1999. In 2019 he stood for re-election against former Vice-President and People’s Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Atiku Abubakar. Abubakar emerged successful from PDP primaries in October 2018 but was unable to defeat Buhari in the presidential election – held on 23 February 2019 after a last-minute week-long delay – winning 41.2% of the vote to Buhari’s 55.6% (Stears, 2019).

Presidential elections occurred concurrently with elections held on 9 March 2019 to elect members of the legislature in Nigeria and decide on the governors of 29 of Nigeria’s 36 states. Supplementary elections had to be held in select polling stations in six states³ on 23 March due to instances where the margin of victory was less than the number of cancelled votes. Elections were cancelled in Rivers state and were later held in April 2019.

The issue of corruption was less pronounced throughout the 2019 elections than in 2015, when tackling corruption along with the Boko Haram insurgency were the two core campaign messages of Buhari and the APC. Tackling insecurity remained a focus for both candidates in 2019 but reviving the struggling economy and creating jobs were at the centre of both PDP and APC campaigns. Corruption remained an important theme in 2019 nonetheless, with the source of Abubakar’s wealth a popular focus for APC supporters.

³ Adamawa, Benue, Bauchi, Sokoto, Kano, and Plateau

Whilst Buhari's own anti-corruption image remains strong, his ability to tackle its systemic encroachment into the governance system in Nigeria was weakened during his first term. Some ministerial appointments, in particular, were not seen to be in-keeping with his promised anti-corruption drive and the circulation of some videos in late 2018 which allegedly showed Governor of Kano and APC member Umar Ganduje accepting thousands of dollars in cash as a bribe (which was publicly ignored by Buhari and the party) led to questions about the politicisation of Buhari's anti-corruption agenda.

1.3. Study rationale

The Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) research consortium recognises not just the harmful effects of corruption on society but also the relative ineffectiveness of formal anti-corruption measures and existing legal frameworks to change mindsets in Nigeria. ACE seeks to proffer workable approaches to support incremental progress in anti-corruption through initiatives that align with on-the-ground realities. As part of the research, this two-part working paper series provides detailed analysis on how corruption is reported in Nigeria around election cycles.

This study, which builds on a similar assessment of corruption reporting during the 2015 elections (Komolafe et al., 2019), considers the intersection between corruption, the media and Nigeria's election process. In doing so, the research aims to better understand the types of corruption reporting that are prevalent in Nigeria, the issues scrutinised most often, and to ask if and in what ways this coverage impacts on policy-making or helps set the public agenda on corruption cases and anti-corruption efforts.

1.4. Study approach and methodology

Corruption coverage published by six Nigerian newspapers⁴ – four in print and two online – from January 2018 to July 2019 was analysed in an attempt to better understand the ways in which general elections shape media focus on this socio-political issue. This time period allowed the study to capture the run-up to the primaries, the holding of those primaries in September and October 2018, the election campaigns, the voting period (which extended across February and March 2019) and a four-month post-election period. An additional area of focus that emerged during the research was reports on modern-day slavery (see Box 1, section 2.2.2).

The study focused on print and online newspapers because they are easy to access and have more complete datasets for the period under consideration. We acknowledge that radio and television are also important, but the difficulty of analysing programming on the national scale required would have skewed any data gathered. The growing importance of social media in

⁴ *Punch, Premium Times, Sahara Reporters, The Daily Trust, Vanguard and ThisDay.*

the 2019 election, particularly the role of WhatsApp (Hitchin et al., 2019; see Box 2), is briefly discussed but is not the focus of this report.

To ensure political balance, the newspapers were selected for their regional representation across Nigeria’s six geo-political zones. According to the All Media Product Survey (Media Planning Services, 2018), *Punch* has the largest readership in the south-west, south-south and north-central geo-political zones; *Vanguard* is the second most-read publication in the south-east (behind *The Sun*); and *The Daily Trust* is the most-read newspaper in the north-east and second most-read in the north-west geopolitical zones. While the print runs for these newspapers is between 100,000–150,000 copies daily, readership rates are higher yet hard to measure for two reasons. Firstly, newspapers are shared between friends, within communities and by co-workers, meaning that one copy can be read by many individuals. Second, with digital versions of all papers now in existence, printed articles are also available to a growing online audience (see Table 1).⁵

Premium Times and *Sahara Reporters* are digital media outlets and therefore take their readership purely from this online audience. These two investigative news platforms focus on drawing attention to regulatory failures and on holding all forms of power to account in line with Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution. *Premium Times* is owned and run by two journalists, whilst *Sahara Reporters* was founded by Omoyele Sowore, a human rights activist, pro-democracy campaigner and one of 73 presidential candidates in 2019, who has been in state detention since August of this year accused of treason (Eboh, 2019).

Table 1. Newspapers’ online presence

Newspaper	Alexa country ranking (September 2019)	Estimated site visits per month	Estimated page views per month
Punch	9	328,781	825,771
This Day	192	33,147	56,317
Vanguard	14	350,849	1,147,648
Daily Trust	127	Not available	Not available
Premium Times	59	166,870	552,795
Sahara Reporters	79	105,350	159,996

Note: Alexa ranking is a measure of website popularity.
Source: www.alexa.com

In total 3,626 stories – 2,326 from 2018 and 1,300 from 2019 – were identified as relevant and were analysed by the research team. This analysis was done manually, using print media newspapers archived in libraries in Abuja and Lagos by two teams of researchers to produce both quantitative and qualitative data.

⁵ The Nigeria Communication Commission estimates that there are 113 million internet users in the country (cited in EU, 2019).

A team of eight researchers were tasked with manually reading editions of the four print newspapers and tracking the coverage of the two online media outlets to document articles within which corruption was mentioned. A further team of ten researchers were then responsible for providing content analysis for each story identified. This analysis entailed a loose categorisation of stories into twelve major corruption themes; categorisation of the type of article under review; attempts to capture the sector in which a story was situated; analysis of the individual(s) or entities implicated or mentioned in a story; and a one-to-five ranking of the extent to which the stories connected politics and corruption (see Table 2). For example, cases of bank scams and internet fraud were ranked one as they had few direct political links, while cases of corruption charges brought against businessmen who donated significant sums to political campaigns were scored three, with a ranking of five saved for stories which directly implicated or alleged the involvement of politicians or civil servants in corrupt activities.

Table 2. Research typologies

Corruption themes	Types of articles	Sectors
Bribery	News	Politics
Misappropriation	Features	Business
Money laundering	Analysis	Security
Theft	Opinion	Power
Fraud	Editorial	Health
Election tampering	Column	Oil and gas
Diversion of funds	Cartoon	Education
Forgery	Letter to the editor	Banking
Embezzlement	Advertorial	Private business people
Non-asset declaration	Brief	General
Graft	Photo news	Judiciary
Other	Interview	Legislature

During the 2015 study efforts were made to utilise Nvivo software to capture this information but challenges including poor online archival systems of the news outlets, inconsistent cross-posting of print edition stories online and differing headlines between online and offline versions (observed for both *ThisDay* and *Vanguard*) meant that a manual approach was preferred for this study. While this increases the human bias element of the study, the approach was deemed to be the most effective way of ensuring the best coverage of corruption issues across the six newspapers. It remains possible that some stories that featured corruption were missed in our study due to human error.

The data collected across the 19-month period is analysed and discussed in section 2, with a focus on understanding where and why spikes in corruption reporting occur during the election cycle, the sorts of corruption issues that are most prominent in reporting, how the

data compares with what was observed in 2015 (Komolafe et al., 2019), and the differences in how the six newspapers covered particular corruption stories and issues throughout the 2019 election period. With regards to the latter, four case studies⁶ provide in-depth analysis of the different ways in which corruption is reported across the six outlets. We summarise our conclusions in section 3 and set out recommendations in section 4 as to the approaches needed to support impactful corruption reporting around elections in Nigeria.

⁶The 4 case studies look at the Diezani scandal, the case against Patience Jonathan, the suspension of Nigeria's Chief Justice and a comparison of two prominent political figures (from the two main political parties) accused of misappropriating funds.

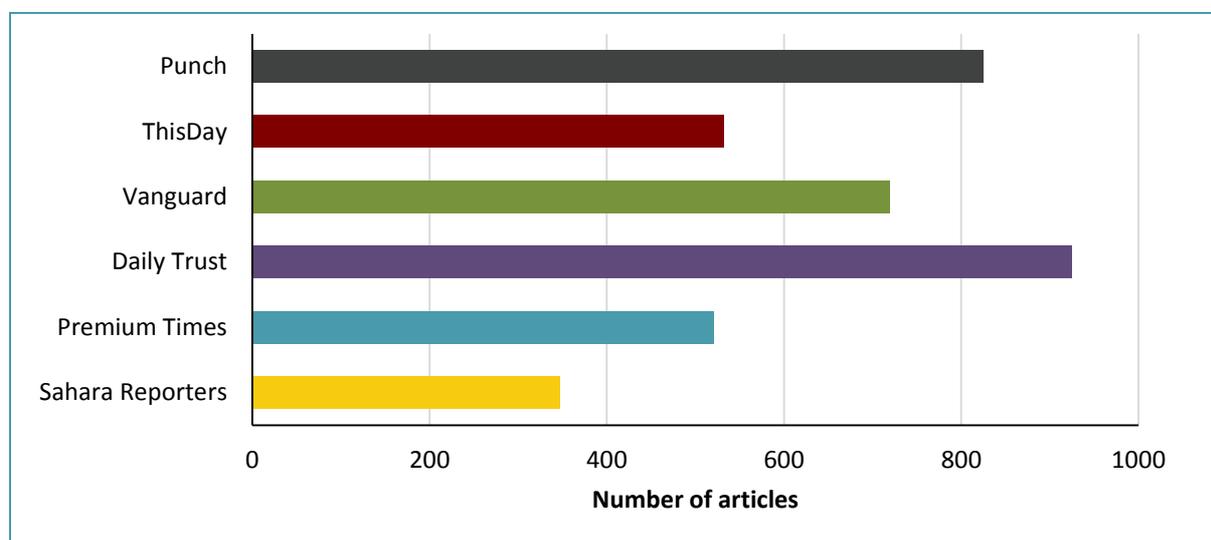
2. Key findings

This section draws out some key findings on the ways in which corruption was reported by the six media outlets around the 2019 election cycle in Nigeria. Specific cases are then used to illustrate how these broader trends relate to some of the most prominent corruption issues of the survey period.

2.1. Corruption coverage during the 2019 election cycle: interpreting the data

Across the 19 months monitored in this study, there were 3,868 corruption-focused pieces published by the six print and online media outlets; equivalent to 204 per month and 34 per newspaper, per month, per newspaper. This is more than double the monthly average recorded for the equivalent survey for the 2015 elections (Komolafe et al., 2019).⁷ Despite the reduced prominence of corruption in party manifestos, corruption was reported more in 2019 than in the run-up to the 2015 elections (Komolafe et al., 2019). This is reflective of the government's renewed commitment (albeit with mixed results) to address corruption since the party came to power four years previously, as well as its use as a political strategy to discredit opponents.

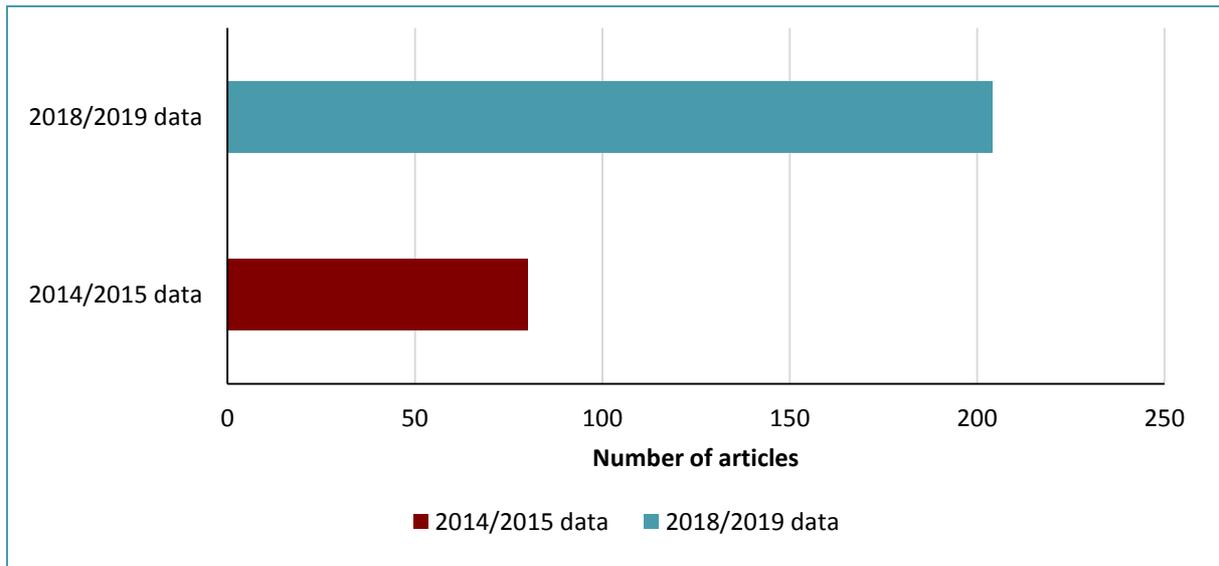
Figure 1. Corruption coverage, January 2018 to July 2019



Source: OCJD (2019)

⁷ In total 962 pieces were recorded over ten months in 2014/15, equivalent to 96 articles per month.

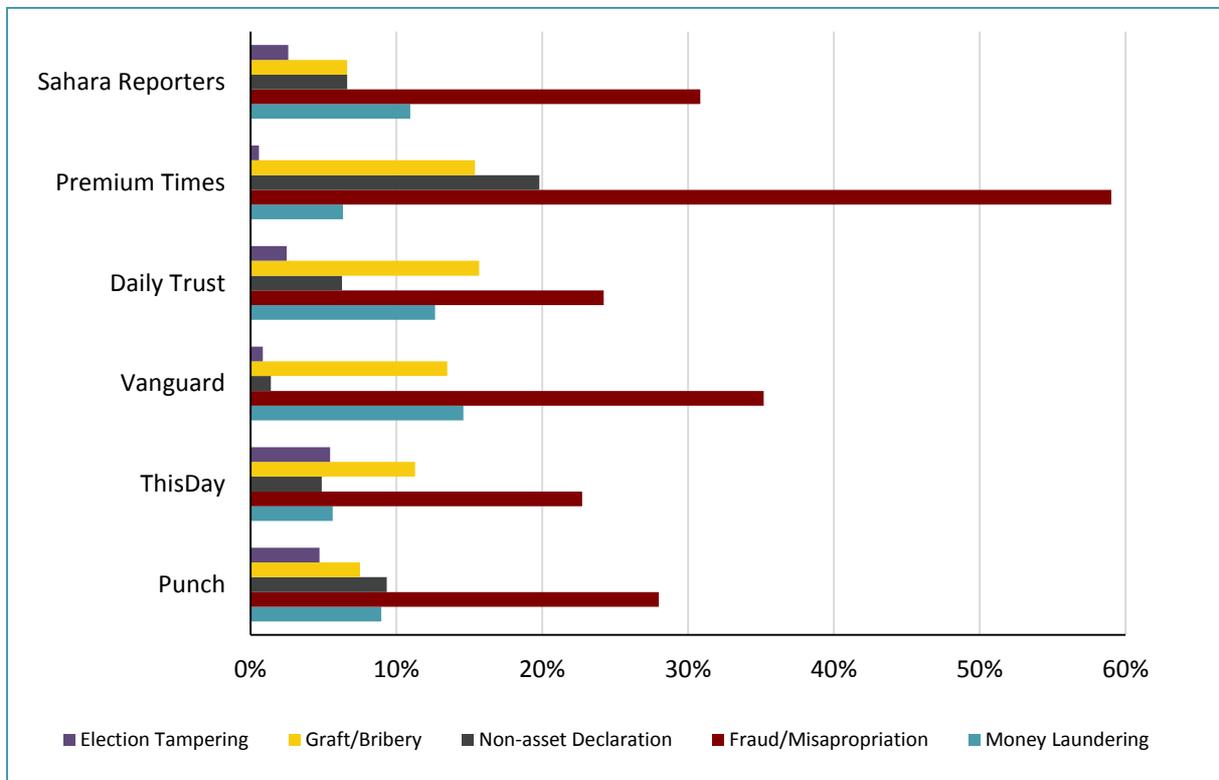
Figure 2. Average number of corruption articles per month across surveys



Source: OCJD (2019)

In terms of the types of corruption being reported on, the majority of pieces across the six newspapers looked at issues of fraud and misappropriation. For *Premium Times*, these two themes accounted for 60% of its corruption reporting in the period under study, while the five other newspapers ranged between 45% (*Vanguard*) and 22% (*ThisDay*).

Figure 3. Key corruption themes (% coverage by paper)



Source: OCJD (2019)

However, stories about election tampering,⁸ which is often part and parcel of political campaigns and is particularly common on voting day, received relatively little coverage: from as low as 1% of all stories covered by *Premium Times* and *Vanguard*, to only as high as 5% by *ThisDay* and 6% by *Punch*. In February and March 2019 – when the national polls were held – 34% of *ThisDay*'s corruption reporting focused on election tampering, which was an editorial decision according to sources at the newspaper. Coverage across other media outlets was far less comprehensive.

Overall, the *Daily Trust* published the most articles mentioning corruption (709) in 2018 and also the single highest number of stories for any month within the research period, of 91 articles in October 2018 (see Table 3). However, between January and March 2019 – when political campaigns and voting were in full swing – the data shows a 49% decrease in reporting on corruption by the *Daily Trust* and over the seven months covered by this survey from January to July 2019 it went from being by far the most prolific reporter of corruption in terms of volume of articles, to fourth out of the six outlets assessed.

Table 3. Highest month for corruption coverage, by paper

Newspaper	Month/year	No. of corruption stories
<i>Punch</i>	May 2018	68
<i>ThisDay</i>	January 2019	72
<i>Vanguard</i>	January 2019	70
<i>Daily Trust</i>	October 2018	91
<i>Premium Times</i>	January 2019	58
<i>Sahara Reporters</i>	November 2019	40

Throughout the study period, the most corruption stories were recorded in January 2019 (324 articles). This spike can be partially explained by the suspension of Nigeria's now former Chief Justice, Walter Onnoghen, after he was charged for failing to declare his personal assets to the Code of Conduct Bureau before taking office⁹ (BBC News, 2019a). Of the 324 corruption stories published that month, 42% mentioned Onnoghen's case, with all media outlets devoting at least 30% of their corruption coverage to the case (ranging from *Vanguard* with 78% of its corruption coverage to the *Daily Trust* at 31%).

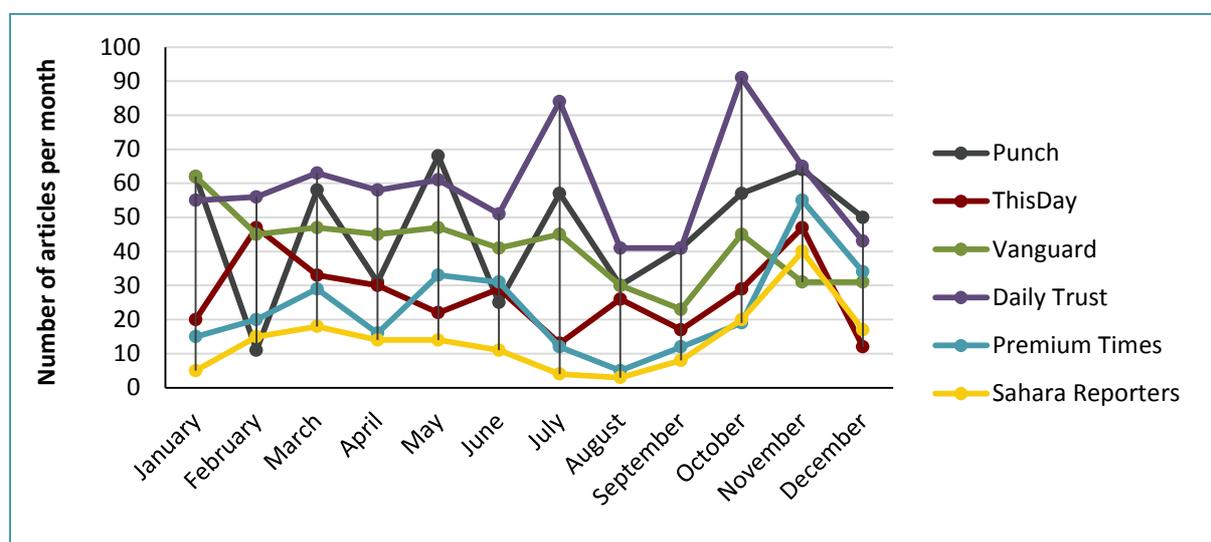
By contrast, April 2019 saw the fewest number of corruption stories in the 2018/19 period with just 107 articles published across the six news outlets. Every other month recorded 135 or more (see Figures 4 and 5). A likely explanation for this is that, following two months of intense electoral competition, both individuals and institutions were taking time to pause and reset. This post-election drop in stories is clearly illustrated by Figure 5 – the *Daily Trust*, with 32 corruption stories in April, published twice as many articles than any other media outlet

⁸ Defined here as stories that covered manipulation of election results, vote buying and ballot-box snatching.

⁹ Onnoghen resigned in April 2019.

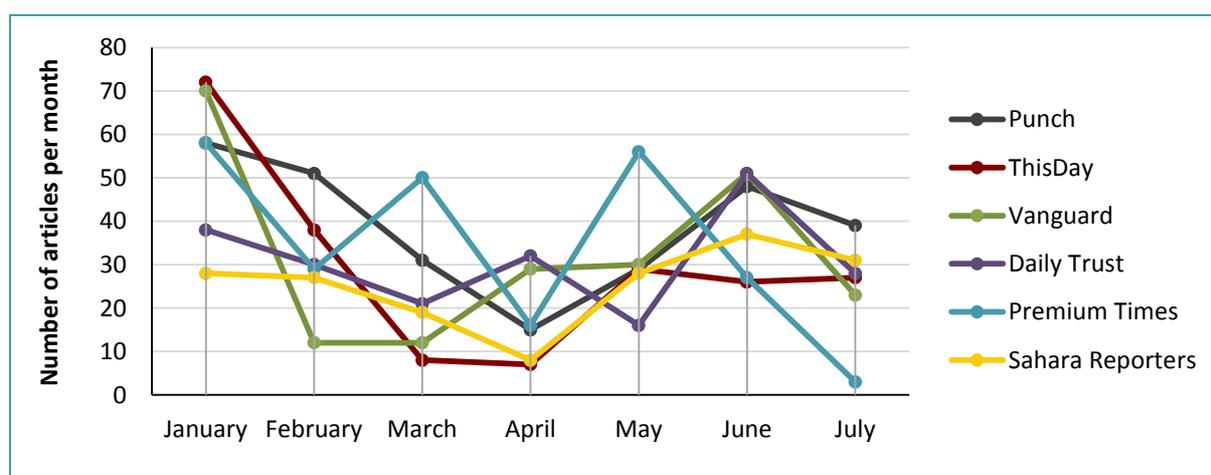
with the exception of Vanguard and focused one third of its coverage on the resignation of Chief Justice Onnoghen, in the main to justify the case brought against him.

Figure 4. 2018 corruption coverage across newspapers



Source: OCJD (2019)

Figure 5. 2019 corruption coverage across newspapers



Source: OCJD (2019)

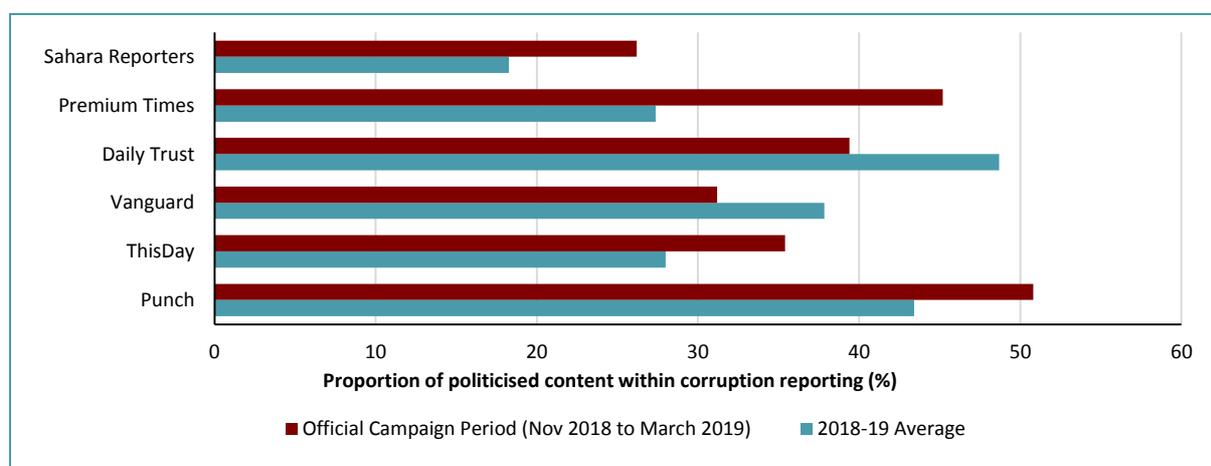
On the whole, the data collected for this study shows a fairly consistent level of coverage of corruption across the 19-month period. Other than a spike in January 2019, driven in part by the case against Chief Justice Onnoghen, the other most notable increase in corruption coverage can be seen in October and November 2018. These two months, falling just after primary elections are concluded by the two major parties, in general terms are a time when political figures – and especially those with media access – look to use their connections to advance their own (or their chosen candidate's) bid for political success. *Sahara Reporters* and *Daily Trust* recorded their highest number of corruption stories in November and October respectively, with figures for *ThisDay* and *Premium Times* also nearing the highest number of corruption reports for any month in the study. Given the nature of the coverage – much of which presents accusations and counter accusations between parties and

individuals – it is fair to assume that this spike in coverage coincided with the leveraging of media connections by political figures.

All six media outlets studied had the greatest volume of corruption coverage either directly after the party primaries or in the run-up to the 2019 vote.¹⁰ But, as noted in previous media monitoring campaigns, the quality of that coverage is questionable (Komolafe et al., 2019). During the official campaign and voting period (November 2018 to March 2019) 90% of the articles that discussed corruption across the six media outlets surveyed were news reportage. These, for the most part, lacked detailed analysis from well-informed experts or failed to provide context that linked the issues raised to wider development challenges in Nigeria.

The survey data also illustrates how corruption coverage becomes more focused on political issues in the campaign period. Across the 19 months covered by the survey, corruption-related stories were ranked as having significant political focus or implications 54% of the time; a figure that increased to 59% during the official campaign and voting period. Perhaps the most important insight the data provides is the consistent link between corruption and politics in Nigeria. According to the survey data, the *Daily Trust* and *Premium Times* were the most likely to have produced content that was, in part, politicised, while *ThisDay* ran the least politically focused pieces (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Political influence on corruption reporting



Source: OCJD (2019)

¹⁰ October 2018 (*Daily Trust*), November 2018 (*Sahara Reporters*), January 2019 (*ThisDay*, *Vanguard* and *Premium Times*) and February 2019 (*Punch*).

2.2. Corruption in focus: case studies

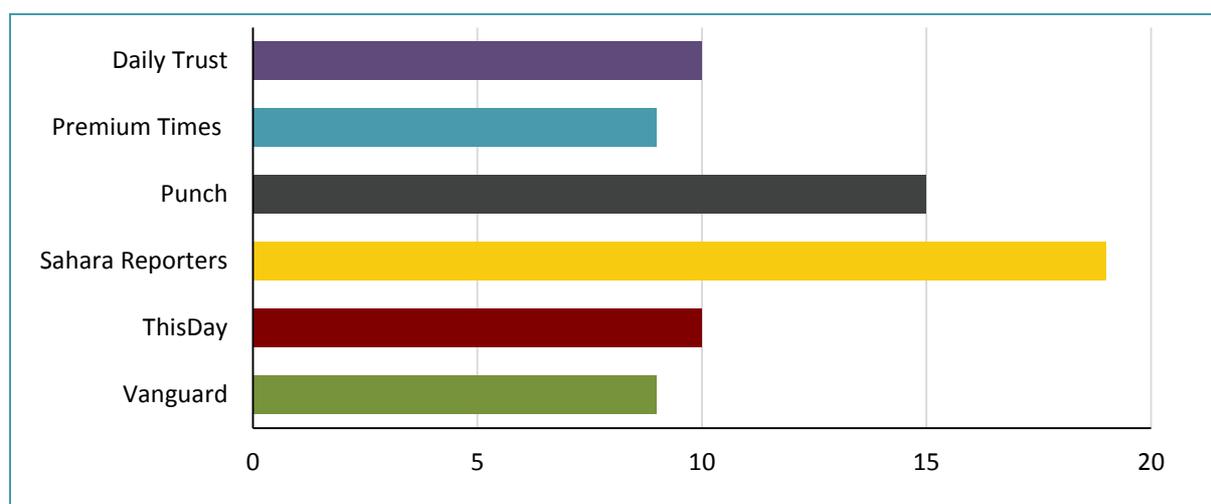
Corruption-related news content assessed for this study focused primarily on individuals rather than institutions, a reflection of the Nigerian media’s ‘penchant for voyeuristic coverage’ (Komolafe et al., 2019). Just 23 of the 3,868 stories analysed for this study discussed the reform or performance of the EFCC, a key institution in the fight against corruption. The majority of coverage was devoted to corruption cases involving high-profile individuals with access – directly or indirectly – to power.

2.2.1. *The Diezani oil scandal ... continued*

The Diezani oil scandal stems from questions raised by the former governor of Nigeria’s Central Bank over the possible illegal non-remittance of \$20 billion of oil revenue by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). The case against NNPC began in late 2013 but by February 2014 it had started to focus heavily on the then Minister of Petroleum Resources (2010–2015), Diezani Alison-Madueke. Coverage was consistent across the run-up to and conduct of elections, with the APC particularly keen to politicise the issue and accuse the PDP of suppressing investigations (Komolafe et al., 2019).

In the period under study for this second wave of research, interest in the case continued with fairly even coverage across the six news outlets (see Figure 7). The request to have Diezani extradited to stand trial in Nigeria in late 2018, three years after she was first charged and then released on bail in the UK, was the focus of a large proportion of the coverage. Most of the newspapers reported on the story in such a way that they simply restated official press releases and statements by officials from the EFCC. One notable exception, however, was *ThisDay* which published two pieces in November 2018 – one feature article and the other a column – that criticised the EFCC and accused it of using Diezani as a ‘propaganda tool’ (Akinloye, 2018) and of ‘fighting elections, not corruption’ (Momodu, 2018).

Figure 7. Diezani coverage by newspaper (January 2018 to July 2019)



Source: OCJD (2019)

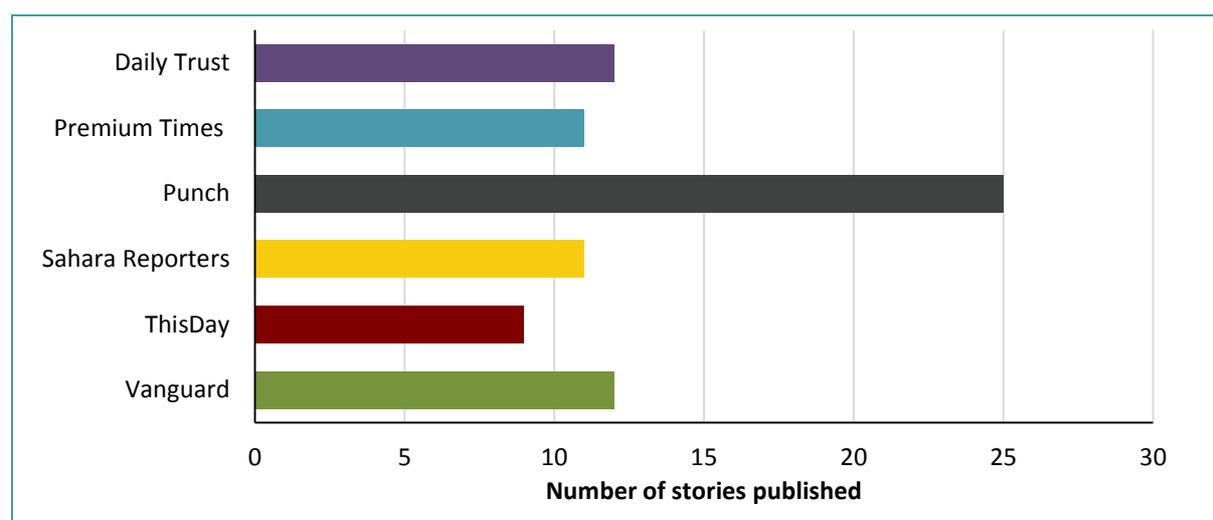
In 2019, *Sahara Reporters* published the majority of the follow-up coverage to the ongoing case against Diezani, commenting on the arrival of UK investigators to Nigeria in June 2019. But the newspaper’s main focus has been on the fallout of the corruption she oversaw by documenting several court cases that have seen bank directors brought to court, a former Independent National Election Commission official convicted for seven years for taking bribes and allegations put forward against former Kano State Governor, Ibrahim Shekararu (*Sahara Reporters*, 2019). *Sahara Reporters* has published as many articles (11) in 2019 about the Diezani case and its ongoing impact as all other media outlets combined this year, and in a more analytical way than much of the other coverage.

2.2.2. *Patience Jonathan and the EFCC*

Patience Jonathan, Nigeria’s former first lady (2010–2015), has been implicated in a series of legal cases involving properties and cash since her husband Goodluck Jonathan was beaten in the 2015 election by Muhammadu Buhari. In 2016 the EFCC froze accounts containing \$31.4 million controlled by the former first lady. She claimed some of the money was for payment of medical bills and vowed to sue the anti-graft agency (Kazeem, 2016). The dispute continued throughout Buhari’s first term in office, with several seizures and allegations made by the EFCC challenged by Patience Jonathan.

Coverage of these allegations in 2018 was noticeable and consistent across all six newspapers but declined significantly in 2019 when just 19% of corruption stories related to this case. *Punch*, the newspaper with the greatest readership in the south-south zone from where Patience Jonathan hails from, devoted the greatest column space to her corruption case with coverage almost double that of all the other media outlets. However, as like the other newspapers, the vast majority of articles by *Punch* were simply updates on the state of the legal case.

Figure 8. Patience Jonathan coverage by newspaper (January 2018 to July 2019)



Source: OCJD (2019)

There remains an ongoing legal battle, with the Federal High Court in Lagos ordering the final forfeiture of N9.2 million and \$8.4 million belonging to Patience Jonathan in July 2019 (Fadipe, 2019). However, there has been very little commentary or analysis on the potential political machinations of the case and few efforts to investigate the arguments and counter-arguments put forward by the EFCC and Ms Jonathan. While newspapers have been keen to report updates and comments from both sides on this high-profile case (such vast sums of wealth involved provides good headline material to sell newspapers), more detailed assessment of the context surrounding the investigation comes with the risks of potential lawsuits. *Sahara Reporters* has been the exception and has provided more investigative coverage, including a piece that provided a clear outline of the case and of the allegations put forward by the EFCC against Patience Jonathan (*Sahara Reporters*, 2018).

It is interesting to note here that despite the predominance of men in Nigeria's political space (there has not been a female state governor elected since 1999, for example), and the fact that the majority of corruption cases have links to political figures, two of the three most reported corruption stories in the study period focused on women. Undoubtedly these cases, against a former oil minister and a former first lady, support the findings of previous research that there is a level of gender bias in print media reporting of female political actors in Nigeria: Eshiet (2013: 135) found that coverage of female political figures was 'sensationalised, hyped and trivialised' when compared with their male counterparts.

Box 1 provides a brief summary of reportage on one of the most important corruption-related issues in Nigeria – that of modern day slavery – that also has a considerable impact on women. This suggests that the imbalance results from the possible gendered effects of corruption, rather than being an issue with unequal reporting by mainstream media.

Box 1. Modern day slavery: a lack of issue-based coverage

In November 2017, CNN broadcast a slave auction of 12 Nigerian men in a town not far from Tripoli, Libya. Although modern day slavery is far from a new phenomenon, the video brought this horrific reality onto the screens of Nigerians. The outrage was instant and vociferous but media reporting on the issue was notably absent from our survey. Thousands of Nigerian women and girls have been trafficked within Nigeria, to other countries in Africa, and to Europe in recent years. Many are escaping dire economic situations at home, where jobs are hard to come by. Some are fleeing violent conflicts driven in part by climate change and a scramble over scarce resources, some have suffered exclusion and discrimination that has left them unable to fend for themselves, while others are vulnerable to exploitation as they seek to escape abusive families (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

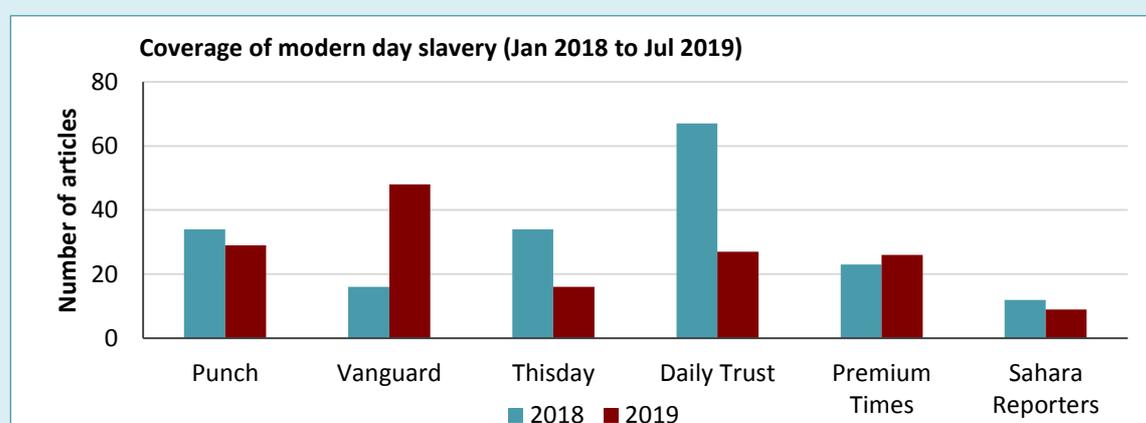
During the period under review, a total of 341 news stories were reported across the monitored news platforms, with the northern-based Daily Trust providing the largest degree of coverage by volume. However, none of the six news outlets ran any investigative stories during this period or reported on the mechanisms of corruption or political linkages that help to facilitate modern day slavery activities.

It is difficult to say how many women and girls are trafficked from, into, and within Nigeria, as there is no reliable data. The numbers of “potential” Nigerian trafficking victims in Italy has shot up in recent years. In 2017, the latest available data, IOM reported a 600 percent increase in the number of potential sex trafficking victims arriving in Italy by sea, with most arriving from Nigeria. The organization estimated that 80 percent of women and girls arriving from Nigeria—whose numbers had soared from 1,454 in 2014 to 11,009 in 2016—were potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the streets and brothels of Europe. (Human Rights Watch, 2019)

Human-trafficking networks are closely linked to organised-crime networks and corruption (Ellis, 2016), which may explain the lack of domestic coverage. Whilst most media houses are aware of the issues, reporting these stories poses risks given that powerful individuals – both politically and financially – often lie at the heart of smuggling or crime networks. It is also worth noting that none of the presidential candidates in the 2019 general elections spoke about modern day slavery on their campaign trails or referenced it in their party manifestos.

The Global Slavery Index (Walk Free Foundation, 2018) rates Nigeria's vulnerability to modern day slavery at an alarming 74/100, measuring the connection between modern day slavery and systemic factors such as governance issues, lack of basic needs and inequality. According to 2018 data from the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP, 2018), however, there has been a reduction in the number of reported cases of human trafficking and the number of rescued victims in Nigeria. The data (2018) identifies clusters of destination countries (including Saudi Arabia and transit countries such as Mali and Libya) and Nigerian states that are the main departure points, with Edo, Kano and Delta holding the biggest share in 2018.

In Edo State the traditional ruler Oba Ewuare II is the paramount authority. He is a former Nigerian ambassador to Italy and the first royal who has openly acknowledged and is working to end trafficking in Edo. Whilst Edo saw a drop in recorded cases in 2018, it remains a key hub for modern day slavery in Nigeria.

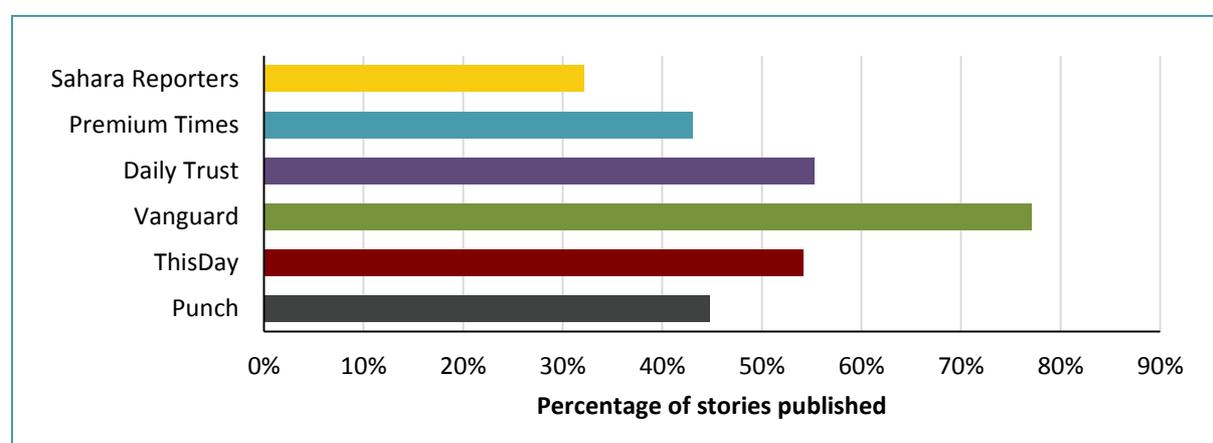


Source: OCJD (2019)

2.2.3. A question of assets: Chief Justice Onnoghen

The suspension of Nigeria's now former Chief Justice, Walter Onnoghen, in January 2019 after he was charged for failing to declare his personal assets to the Code of Conduct Bureau before taking office was the most reported corruption story in the period under review. From only one *Premium Times* article mentioning his name throughout 2018, 130 news pieces were published across the six news outlets in January 2019 alone that discussed the case. This is no surprise given the seniority of the accused, combined with the opposition party's claim that the timing was political. Elections scheduled in February and March 2019 were expected to be close, and with Onnoghen not viewed as a Buhari appointment, there were suggestions that this move was calculated to ensure that should a court case ensue – which it did – the APC would have an ally at the apex of the judicial system (BBC, 2019b).

Figure 9. Percentage coverage of Onnoghen case in January 2019, by newspaper



Source: OCJD (2019)

Vanguard published the greatest proportion of coverage on the Onnoghen case in January 2019 with 54 news items – 42% of the total coverage of the case from the six newspapers that month. However, the majority of these articles were reports on statements made by the courts, representatives of the chief justice himself or associations such as the National Association of Nigerian Students and National Bar Association that were critical of the decision. Only one opinion column was printed by *Vanguard* on the issue – ‘Onnoghen’s suspension unconstitutional’ – which was again critical of the government's decision (Engholase, 2019).

This was broadly true of the coverage of the case in January as a whole, as the six newspapers reported on the happenings and responses of certain groups and individuals without much effort to gather balanced analysis of the arguments for and against Onnoghen's suspension. On the whole, where commentary pieces did appear, they were often critical of the government's decision to arraign the chief justice at such a politically sensitive moment (Adedokun, 2019). However, the *Daily Trust* published a couple of news items that defended the government's action, criticised the chief justice for his actions and that blamed ‘civil society hired guns’ for the outcry (Ilallah, 2019). *Punch* also published a critical opinion piece on ‘Onnoghen’s cocktail of excuses’ (Akinola, 2019).

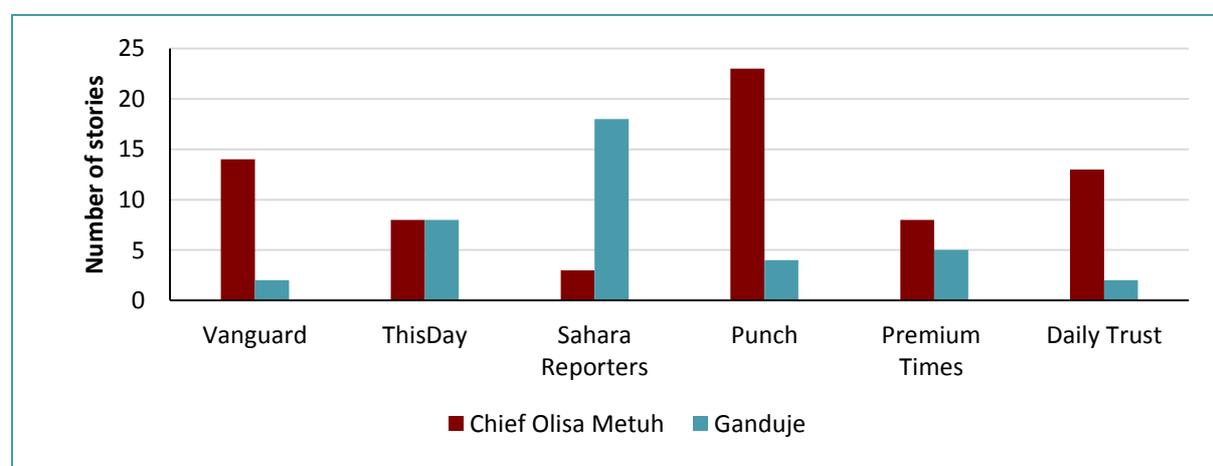
The *Daily Trust* and *Punch* provided the most comprehensive coverage of the Onnoghen case after January 2019. Whilst coverage completely disappeared from the *Vanguard*, 73% of the *Daily Trust*'s coverage of the case and 42% of *Punch*'s coverage was published between February and July 2019. But whilst *Punch*'s coverage predominantly focused on reporting updates on the case against the suspended chief justice, the *Daily Trust* increasingly published more analysis-driven and opinion pieces, particularly after Onnoghen resigned in 2019, justifying the government's decision and offering some greater context as to what his case said about the state of Nigeria's judiciary – 'Nigerian Judiciary on trial' and 'The final nail in the judiciary's coffin?' are examples here (Ilallah, 2019; Enahoro, 2019). This is perhaps to be expected given the pro-Buhari slant that the northern-based paper is widely perceived to have.

2.2.4. Corruption in comparison: Ganduje versus Chief Olisa Metuh

This study looks to compare two cases to better understand the ways in which politics can impact on corruption reporting and coverage. The first concerns the ongoing corruption trial of former PDP national publicity secretary Chief Olisa Metuh, who was charged by the EFCC in 2016 with seven counts of corruption, including allegedly receiving up to \$2 million from 'illegal activity' overseen by former National Security Adviser Mohammed Sambo Dasuki (Butty, 2016; Komolafe et al., 2019). The second case involves the governor of Kano State, Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, after videos emerged which allegedly showed him taking bribes amounting to \$230,000 from contractors in October 2018 (Africa News, 2018). These are allegations that Ganduje has denied and which have not yet been investigated by the EFCC or others.

In terms of numbers, 67 articles were published across the six media outlets which discussed Metuh's case and just 31 which discussed the allegations against Ganduje (see Figure 10). The limited time period – Ganduje's alleged transgression took place midway through the timeframe for this survey – can partially explain this difference, but political influence and context are arguably just as important.

Figure 10. Coverage of Ganduje case vs Chief Olisa Metuh (Jan 2018 to July 2019)



Source: OCJD (2019)

Despite Buhari's anti-corruption stance, he was unwilling to address the videos of Ganduje, knowing that Kano State – with the second largest number of registered voters – was a key vote-bank for his re-election bid. Buhari eventually won 1.46 million votes in the state; almost 10% of the total votes cast for him (Stears, 2019). In Nigeria, a major strategy used by politicians during crisis management is to hold a meet-the-editors forum whereby editors are paid to 'water down' or 'bury' stories. However, editors spoken to for this research argued that the lack of follow up to the initial videos by key state actors – neither the EFCC or the Kano State House of Assembly sought to investigate further – along with the poor quality of the videos and the preventative court action taken by Ganduje limited interest in the case. One editor noted that without any new developments in a case, it was unlikely that it would continue to be the central focus for media outlets for more than a couple of days.

However, analysts have argued that an effective social media campaign to discredit Ganduje, which showcased the videos on WhatsApp and Facebook, had a major negative effect on the level of his electoral support in urban areas (Hitchen and Hassan, 2019). According to Yau of the Centre for Information Technology and Development in Kano, 'voting patterns revealed continued support for the embattled governor in rural areas, where online access remains limited, but we saw significant opposition gains in urban areas' (Yau, cited in Hitchen and Hassan, 2019). Ganduje went from winning 75% of votes in 2015, to winning an opaque supplementary vote by just 0.46% in hotly disputed polls in 2019 (Stears, 2019). Box 2 provides a brief overview of the role that WhatsApp played in these elections.

Only after the presidential election was held did a few more investigative news pieces emerge on this issue. Until that point, the majority of the media stories had reported the responses of various actors to the original allegations which emerged from investigative reporting by the online news platform the *Daily Nigerian* (Arise News, 2018). This type of investigative reporting into high-profile officials is not common in Nigeria but shows it is possible. However, in spite of the compelling evidence presented, no action has been taken against the sitting governor by law enforcement officials, which suggests the limited ability of media outlets to impact on politics.

Box 2. WhatsApp and the 2019 elections

Research by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2019) shows that there has been a concerted (and increasing) attempt to sway the electorate along partisan and ethnic lines through often false online content shared on social networks and closed messaging systems such as WhatsApp. CDD describes how 'the information-warfare that has often characterised Nigerian politics, and by extension its elections, has begun to shift online' (ibid: 14).

WhatsApp is the most popular social media platform in Nigeria (Kemp, 2019) due to its simplicity, the speed at which information is shared, its low data costs, privacy – as compared to more public platforms such as Twitter and Facebook – and the intimacy in how messages are shared, often directly with friends or in groups built around offline social structures (Hassan et al., 2019). Although less than a quarter of Nigeria's 113 million internet users are on social media (EU, 2019), the content shared on private messaging applications such as WhatsApp does not always stay in the digital sphere. Information shared online can come offline and be shared by callers to radio phone-in shows, influential community and religious figures and through pre-existing word-of-mouth networks.

The features of WhatsApp explain why it has become a tool for deliberate attempts to mislead others through the creation of false stories (disinformation) and the innocent sharing of made up stories by people who believe it to be true (misinformation) (Cheeseman et al., 2019). Many of these false stories – produced by politically affiliated individuals and media outlets, as well as more established news sources – contain elements of truth but build on citizens' existing biases using a range of pictures, videos and audio, along with text, all in local languages. Deciphering what is true and what is not, is not always easy.

The growing importance of social media is perhaps best reflected in the use by political actors of 'social media entrepreneurs' and organised yet informal youth-led social media teams, some of whom are volunteers and others who are paid or promised jobs and contracts contingent on their candidate's victory (Hitchen and Hassan, 2019; Hitchen et al., 2019). Politicians and political parties are cognisant of the need to have an online presence, even if the direct impacts on winning votes or shaping electoral outcomes is not yet clear (Hitchen et al., 2019).

2.2.5. What are the consequences of media coverage of corruption?

The Ganduje example, although published by a news outlet (*Daily Nigerian*) outside the scope of this study, shows the limits that media investigations can have on pushing forward an anti-corruption agenda in Nigeria. Despite albeit low-quality video evidence to support the claim that Ganduje accepted a bribe, no formal action has been taken against him and the occurrence remains an underreported issue, due, in part, to the political affiliation of the accused. It is notable that of the three most-reported corruption cases to focus on

individuals, two were part of the previous PDP administration. Even the Chief Justice, though politically non-partisan, was viewed not as a Buhari loyalist, given that he comes from Nigeria's south-south geo-political zone.

That is not to say that the media is deliberately skewing its coverage to be pro-government, though in some cases it is. The point is more that media reporting is often limited to coverage of what individuals are saying about an investigation or status updates on a case, rather than more investigative work that points to some of the impacts and implications of the accusations. In reporting this back and forth, corruption coverage starts to reflect the government's anti-corruption agenda, which naturally has a political slant, without investigative efforts to hold those in positions of authority to account. Despite Buhari's 2015 electoral promises to tackle corruption in Nigeria, institutional progress has been slow and the focus has been primarily on resolving previous acts of misappropriation and fraud. Whilst a welcome step, Buhari has failed to build more accountable and transparent systems to check future corruption.

The case brought against Chief Justice Onnoghen, which has been widely covered in the media, is illustrative of this. Within three months of taking office, governors are required to submit documents to the Code of Conduct Bureau to detail their personal wealth. But only a handful of governors have made any sort of public declaration of their assets since the 2019 elections, with the rest choosing to fulfil the minimum requirements, which results in information that is not publicly available and provides no details as to the assets held. In an article in July 2019, *Punch's* editorial board published one of the few pieces to focus attention on the continued issue of non-asset declaration (*Punch*, 2019). For the most part, coverage has still focused on individuals rather than institutional and systemic issues, for example the fact that freedom-of-information requests to the Code of Conduct Bureau have remained largely ignored. One request that aimed to obtain copies of declarations made by Ibrahim Tanko Mohammed, who replaced Onnoghen as Nigeria's chief justice, remains unfulfilled and in the courts (Onumah, 2019).

Reporting on cases like those against Diezanani Alison-Madueke, Patience Jonathan and Chief Olisa Metuh – and even the case against Dasuki previously discussed in Komolafe et al. (2019) in relation to the 2015 elections – are the types of stories which continue to dominate media narratives on corruption in Nigeria. The more high-profile the accused, the more problematic the legal dispute. Increasingly politicised judicial processes, which have resulted in convictions of some less prominent officials but which for the most part continue to drag on, further degrade law enforcement and legal institutions in the country. This does not help to build public trust in systems that work to improve accountability and tackle corruption.

The APC's pre-election rhetoric on corruption failed to translate into measurable policy outcomes or sustainable reforms during Buhari's first term in office from 2015. Anti-corruption was far less of a focus of the 2019 campaign and critics argue that Buhari's ministerial list for his second term raises questions about the sincerity of the President's pledge in 2015 to select incorruptible people as ministers – 'some of the names on the ministerial list are of politicians who have previously been charged with corruption. Others have been associated with corrupt practices while in political office' (Dele-Adedeji, 2019). More cases alleging corruption seem likely, but more systematic anti-corruption reform appears unlikely.

3. Conclusions

The survey data shows that corruption coverage around the 2019 elections more than doubled across the six news outlets when compared to 2015. However, concerns about the *quality* of that coverage remain, with the vast majority of stories focused on re-reporting news or comments by individuals and institutions, rather than substantive features and more investigative journalism to interrogate the details of a particular case or outline potential impacts on wider development. Whilst it is true that scandals involving individuals sell more newspapers than a detailed assessment of legislative reform, all media outlets – particularly investigative publications like *Premium Times* and *Sahara Reporters* – have built their reputations on the quality of their reporting.

The increase in corruption reporting is perhaps reflective of the greater focus given to the issues under the Buhari administration, while the content itself reflects the fact that Buhari has devoted more attention to attempting to prosecute individual cases (particularly against political opponents or obstacles) than introducing sustainable and preventative reforms.

The case studies illustrate this point. The number of articles that focused on Diezani Alison-Madueke, Patience Jonathan and former Chief Justice Walter Onnoghen – all of whom were either tied to the former regime or seen as not loyal to the APC – is 2.5 times the number of articles that have dealt with election tampering or the performance or need to reform the EFCC. By reviving allegations of corruption or having officials make statements to boost coverage of a particular issue while remaining silent on others, the government can indirectly set the agenda. This was the case with the Ganduje video, as the government was concerned about the electoral implications of any investigations in a state that represents its major vote bank. This perhaps also explains why little was said by the government, and hence little was reported by the media, as to the progress of the Sambo Dasuki case (Komolafe et al., 2019), which has all but ground to a halt despite Dasuki's continued imprisonment for allegations of having misappropriated \$2 billion when serving as National Security Adviser under President Goodluck Jonathan.

An increase in reporting on corruption may improve citizens' awareness of the misappropriation of wealth and other activities that continue to proliferate in Nigeria, but it does not necessarily increase their understanding of what corruption is and how it impacts them. Focusing on individual cases does not highlight the systemic problems of political corruption, which is central to the ACE framework of anti-corruption. Without a citizen-led push for systemic anti-corruption reform, newspaper reporting is unlikely to have much impact on shaping policy reforms in this area. In fact, by reporting only on individual cases, media outlets are sometimes shaped by how they frame certain issues according to the vested political interests of influential figures.

This is not to say that this type of coverage is unimportant. It is, but in order for it to be more impactful, media outlets must better situate cases within the wider context of development in the country. 'Income inequality is one of Nigeria's most serious but least talked about challenges' (M. Page, cited in Akinwotu, 2017). A report by Oxfam (2017) put Nigeria last in a

list of 152 countries ranked by their commitment to reducing inequality. Proactive reporting on these sorts of issues, rather than journalism that is on the whole responsive to an ongoing corruption case, is more likely to have impactful consequences here.

Through reporting on high-profile cases such as the four featured in this report, the media has the opportunity to discuss some of the fundamental governance challenges facing Nigeria. Whether this be the need for greater transparency in how government operates, the need for more citizen-responsive accountability mechanisms or the importance of building sustainable anti-corruption bodies over the pursuit of individual cases, news outlets – supported by social media platforms that can provide more interactive and engaging platforms for the spread of this type of journalism – can play a key role through more investigative and analytical reporting in supporting a new conversation about the way corruption impacts on all aspects of politics in Nigeria.

4. Recommendations

Reflecting on the findings of the 2015 study (Komolafe et al., 2019) and the analysis of this latest research, there are some clear and tangible ways forward to support incremental and more sustained change in corruption reporting and attitudes towards the issue:

- There may be scope for a media venture that is focused on quality and investigative journalism. Such an outlet would target a small but influential section of Nigerian stakeholders. The business model would be costly as it would not attract mass advertising or 'classified insertion' based advertising, but it would be paid for by those who value quality. Such a publication would also attract loyal advertisers, given the readership. Alternatively, a crowd-funded online media news outlet could have potential, which would be beholden to people who are less politically connected.
- Social media platforms could be utilised to increase the reach of print media. This could entail the production of short audio clips in local languages to supplement written articles (to improve reach); infographics and pictures that illustrate the impacts of corruption (to improve awareness of impact); and more interactive surveys and polls on corruption issues (to improve citizen engagement).
- Agreement could be made to improve the basic pay for reporters, along with a cross-media pledge not to accept 'transport fees' for attending press conferences and announcements, which increases the likelihood of political influence in shaping the angle of corruption stories. This is a longer-term goal, therefore an interim step could be for media outlets to be encouraged to keep, and publicly share, monthly records of such facilitation payments.
- The media could work with civil society organisations to tackle social norms around corruption (Hoffmann and Patel, 2017). One initial way to support this would be to accompany articles on particular cases with explainers that help readers better understand what corruption is.

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