

LEARNING BRIEF #3—QUALITY OF INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING (2016–2020)

ON NIGERIA 2.0



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Introduction

The MacArthur Foundation’s Big Bet On Nigeria program invests in expanding the quality and reach of media and journalism reporting to increase awareness of corruption and anticorruption efforts in Nigeria. This learning brief presents findings and conclusions from an analysis of media monitoring data from 2016–2020 with a specific focus on the quantity and quality of corruption-related investigative reporting supported by media and journalism grantee organizations and non-grantee media sources in Nigeria.¹

This brief confirms the emerging trends captured in the *On Nigeria 2018 Quality of Investigative Reporting Findings: Technical Memo* submitted to the program team in November 2020. This brief further suggests that corruption-related investigative reporting grew—in quantity and quality—in Nigeria between 2016 and 2020, and that On Nigeria grantees have played a role in that growth. However, room for further improvement remains. The program team and grantees may benefit from collaboratively reflecting on the ways in which the media and journalism ecosystem in Nigeria might be further strengthened in the coming years.

Corruption-related investigative reporting grew—in quantity and quality—in Nigeria between 2016 and 2020, and On Nigeria grantees have played a role in that growth.

¹ This brief includes the complete 2020 data on investigative reporting, as well as data on the quality of investigative reporting for all of 2016–2020. It therefore complements the 2019 synthesis report by presenting complete results related to Media and Journalism Outcome 5 in the On Nigeria 1.0 Evaluation & Learning Framework (*Independent media houses and more journalists conduct more and higher quality investigative reporting driven by data to expose corruption, monitor anticorruption promises, and reveal wins*).

Background & Methods

Media and journalism grants became operational in 2017. For this reason, data from 2016 are treated as the baseline in this analysis. Under On Nigeria 1.0, EnCompass and subcontractor Playspread monitored conventional media sources (print, radio, television, and online), using filters, keywords, and sub-keywords related to On Nigeria 1.0's modules to identify and pull corruption-related articles. These articles, along with corruption-related articles produced and/or supported and submitted by media and journalism grantees, comprise the full media monitoring dataset. For the purposes of this learning brief, EnCompass analyzed only corruption-related articles from print and online sources, resulting in a sample of 6,919 articles. EnCompass sorted each article into one of six categories: Investigative; News Story – Potentially Investigative;² News Story – News; News Story – Feature; Op Ed/Editorial; and Press Release/Speech, and then assessed the quality of investigative and potentially investigative articles according to a quality rubric comprised of five domains: Source Variety, Research Quality, Neutrality, Originality, and Public Interest.³ More detail on the media monitoring and quality of investigative reporting methodology is available in **Annexes 1 and 2**.

Sample Description

The quantity of corruption-related articles increased from 2017 to 2020, with grantees progressively publishing a larger proportion of those articles over time (24 percent of the total in 2016 to 47 percent in 2020). Overall, grantees published 39 percent of the 6,919 articles in the sample. The majority of corruption-related articles were news stories, press releases, and speeches. Investigative or potentially investigative articles represented 9 percent of all corruption-related articles. The number of potentially investigative and investigative articles grew from 2016 to 2018, declined in 2019, and increased again in 2020. Exhibit 1 summarizes the sample.

Exhibit 1. Corruption-related articles produced by grantees vs. non-grantees and article categories, 2016–20

	2016 Articles	2017 Articles	2018 Articles	2019 Articles	2020 Articles	Total ⁴
Grantee organization	298 (24%)	295 (45%)	645 (45%)	755 (42%)	839 (47%)	2,832 (41%)
Non-grantee organization	968 (76%)	355 (55%)	793 (55%)	1,040 (58%)	931 (53%)	4,087 (59%)
Investigative and Potentially Investigative ⁵	6 (<1%)	66 (10%)	164 (11%)	114 (6%)	149 (8%)	499 (9%)
News Story – News	N/A	319 (49%)	652 (45%)	768 (43%)	589 (33%)	2,3289 (41%)
News Story – Feature	N/A	24 (4%)	54 (4%)	93 (5%)	106 (6%)	277 (5%)

² The category “News Story - Potentially Investigative” was not included in the 2016 article classification process; therefore, only “Investigative” articles are included in the analysis presented in this brief.

³ The article classification process and quality rubric can be found in **Annex 2**

⁴ 2016 articles are not included in the total calculations.

⁵ Articles classified as Investigative or News Story – Potentially Investigative (also referred to as Potentially Investigative) were combined into one category for analysis.

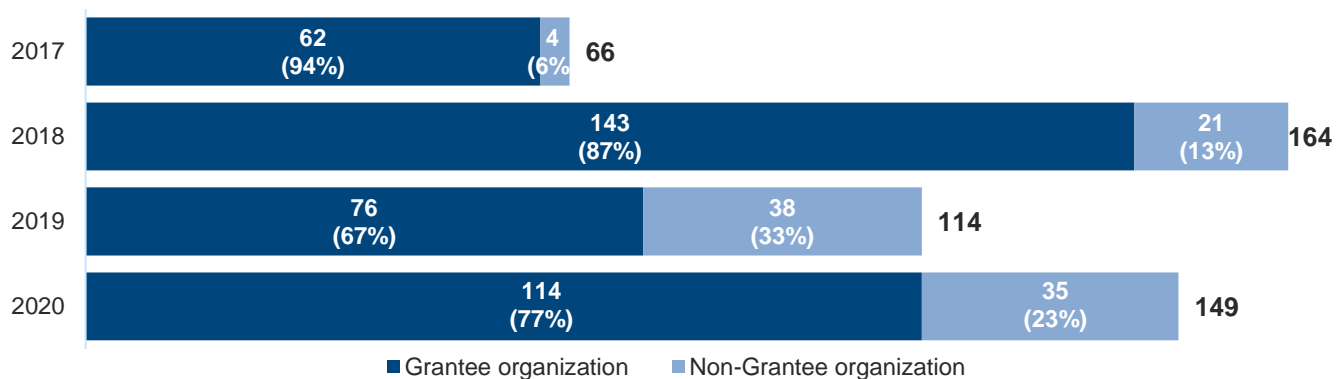
Op-Ed/Editorial	N/A	51 (8%)	131 (9%)	96 (5%)	100 (6%)	378 (7%)
Press Release/Speech	N/A	190 (29%)	437 (30%)	724 (40%)	826 (47%)	2,177 (39%)
Total	1,266	650	1,438	1,795	1,770	5,6539

Findings

Finding 1: Grantee organizations produced a substantial proportion of corruption-related investigative and potentially investigative articles in Nigeria.

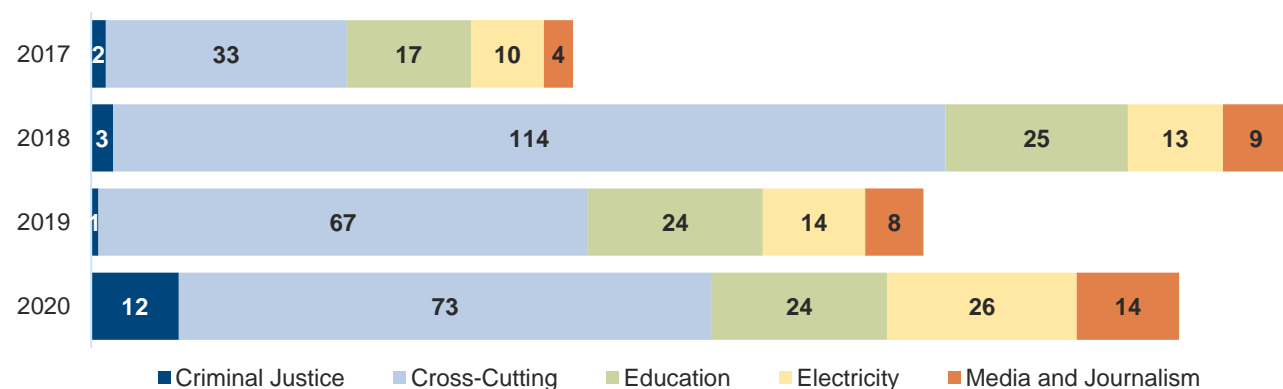
Between 2017 and 2020, grantee sources were responsible for the vast majority of investigative and potentially investigative articles. Grantees produced 94 percent of all such articles in 2017, 87 percent in 2018, 67 percent in 2019, and 77 percent in 2020 (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Quantity and distribution of investigative or potentially investigative articles, 2017–2020



Most investigative reporting was categorized into On Nigeria 1.0’s crosscutting module; other modules saw fewer investigative articles (see Exhibit 3).

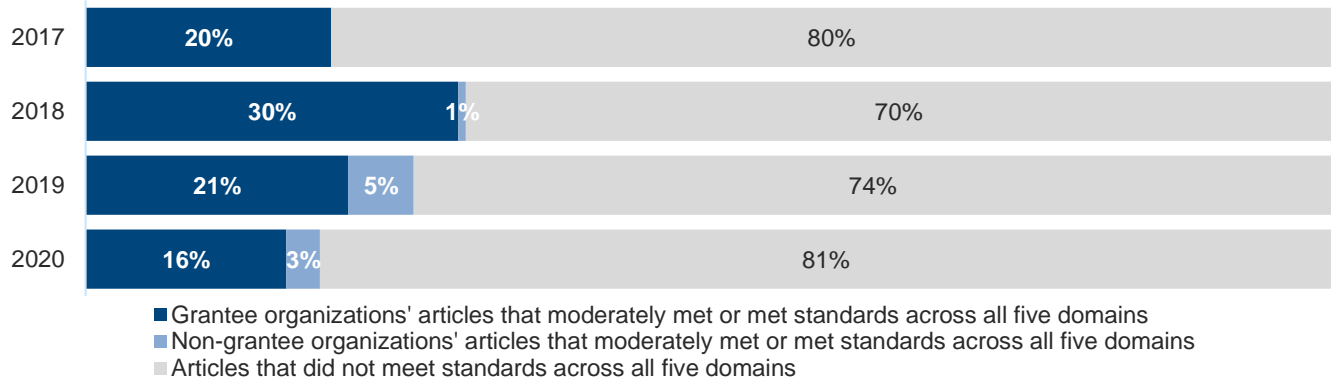
Exhibit 3. Number of articles identified as investigative or potentially investigative, by module 2017–2020



Finding 2: While few investigative or potentially investigative articles met quality standards across all five investigative reporting quality domains, grantees are more likely than non-grantees to produce corruption-related investigative articles that moderately meet or meet quality standards.

Across the four years in which articles were coded into categories, only four investigative or potentially investigative articles—all grantee-produced—fully met *all* quality standards in all five domains. However, about a quarter of investigative or potentially investigative articles at least moderately met all five quality standards (about 20 percent in 2017, about 30 percent in 2018, about 26 percent in 2019, and about 19 percent in 2020). Grantees produced the vast majority of these articles (see **Exhibit 4**).

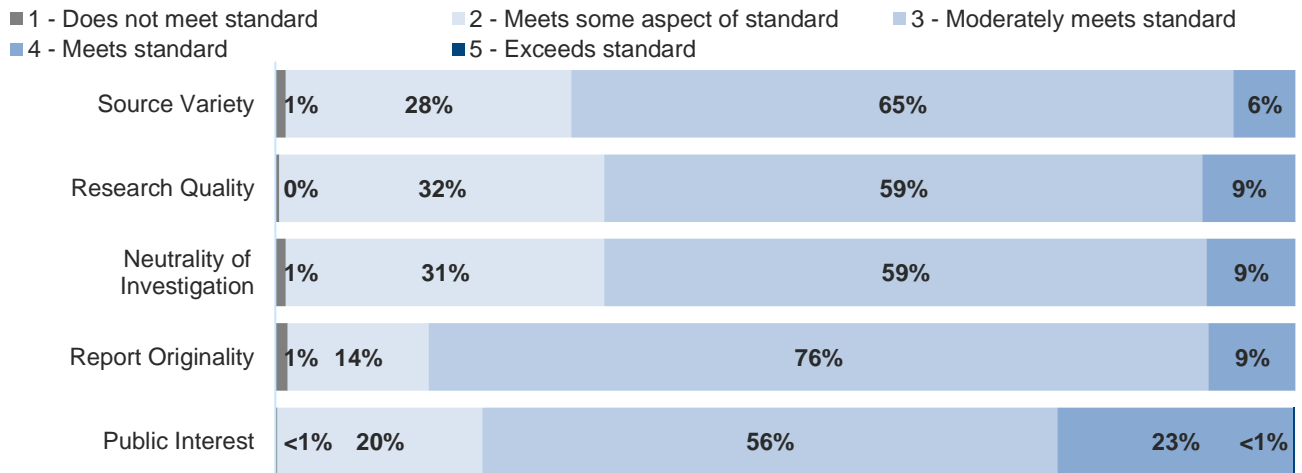
Exhibit 4. Proportion of investigative and potentially investigative articles at least moderately meeting quality standards across all five domains, 2017–2020



Finding 3: Investigative and potentially investigative articles are more likely to meet quality standards for the Public Interest domain. Performance across other domains is more varied.

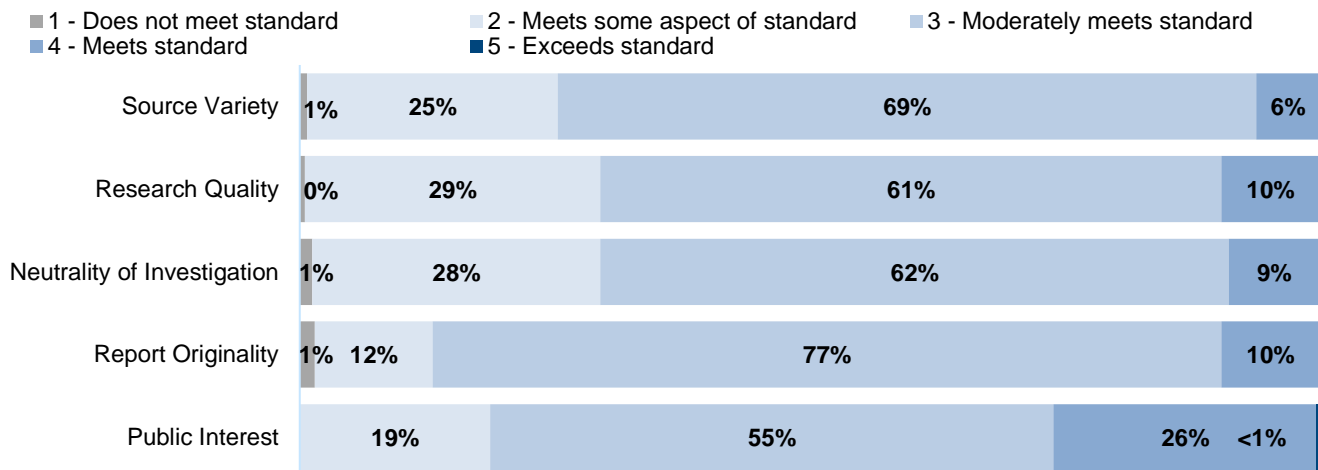
Investigative and potentially investigative articles scored the highest for Public Interest, with 23 percent of articles meeting the quality standard. Performance on other domains differed, with only 9 percent of articles meeting the Research Quality, Neutrality of Investigation, and Report Originality standard, and 6 percent meeting the Source Variety standard. However, articles were most likely to moderately meet quality standards for Originality (76 percent) and Source Variety (65 percent), followed by Research Quality and Neutrality (both at 59 percent) (see **Exhibit 5**).

Exhibit 5. Proportion of investigative or potentially investigative articles scoring on quality standards, by domain, 2017–2020 (grantees and non-grantees combined)



Performance between grantees and non-grantees varied. Non-grantee articles were more likely to meet the Source Variety standard, whereas grantees performed better on Research Quality, Neutrality, and Report Originality, and Public Interest (see Exhibit 6 for grantee performance).

Exhibit 6. Proportion of investigative or potentially investigative articles scoring on quality standards, by domain, 2017–2020 (grantees)



Conclusions

Conclusion 1: The quality and quantity of corruption-related investigative journalism in Nigeria appears to have improved between 2016 and 2020, including with respect to the reporting of On Nigeria grantees, though there is still considerable room for further improvement.

The findings presented in this brief suggest that the volume of corruption-related articles in Nigeria increased in the period 2016–2020, as did the volume (though not proportion) of investigative and potentially investigative articles. It is possible that some of the observed increase in 2018 is attributable to the 2019 elections; nonetheless, 2019 and 2020 saw considerably more corruption-related reporting than 2016. In general, grantee media sources, when compared to non-grantee sources, appear more likely to produce relatively higher quality investigative reporting. Grantees are responsible for the vast majority of investigative articles that perform well or reasonably well across all five investigative reporting domains.

The quality of investigative reporting in Nigeria, however, remains highly variable. Some investigative articles meet standards of Public Interest, Research Quality, Originality, Neutrality, and Source Variety, but many do not consistently and comprehensively comply with investigative journalism best practices. This is true of reports produced by both grantees and non-grantees.

Learning Considerations

These findings suggest that media organizations in Nigeria—both On Nigeria grantees and others—may benefit from additional support as they attempt to further strengthen their approach to

corruption-related reporting and investigative journalism. The priority actions identified by the program team during the development of the On Nigeria 2.0 Theory of Change, which include additional training for media and journalism grantees and additional investments in their financial resilience, do, therefore, seem appropriate. Additional consideration of whether and how to support high-quality corruption-related reporting and investigative journalism may be useful.

As the program team considers the findings and conclusions presented above, it may be useful to reflect on the following questions in particular:

- 1. Are there ways in which the findings and conclusions in this brief could aid grantees in adaptive management of their activities? Are there ways in which the quality investigative reporting rubric itself could serve as a tool for grantees to focus their own efforts and for the sustainability of quality investigative reporting?*
- 2. Do the program team and grantees feel the focus needs to continue to be on quantity and quality of investigative reporting, or one more than the other?*
- 3. To improve the quality of investigative journalism, which challenges need to be addressed? How might reflecting on the five quality domains help focus efforts?*
- 4. What will be needed to contribute to the development of a sustainable media ecosystem in Nigeria, in which media organizations consistently produce high-quality investigative journalism? What is the role of grantees in this work – should they focus on producing more investigative reporting themselves, building the capacity of others to do so, or both? And how is the Foundation best positioned to support, including in collaboration with grantee and, potentially, non-grantee media organizations?*

