LEARNING BRIEF #6–MEDIA MONITORING REPORT (2016-2021)

Authors: Gayatri Malhotra, Michael Moses, Randi Rumbold, Lynne Franco
Contributors: Onaivi Umene Tolutope, Balogun Adedamola, Emiola Olawepo, Ayeni Temitope, Eloho Igwe, Seun Ajayi, and dozens of transcribers led by CEO Segun Jerome of Playspread Limited, Simon Hiltebeitel

Introduction

The MacArthur Foundation's Big Bet On Nigeria program invests in expanding the quality and reach of media and journalism reporting to increase citizen awareness of corruption and engagement in anticorruption efforts in Nigeria. This learning brief explores how the media reported on corruption in Nigeria during 2021 and assesses the quantity and quality[1] of investigative reporting in Nigeria for the period from 2016 to 2021, with particular focus on 2021. Consistent with the trends captured in *Learning Brief #3—Quality Of Investigative Reporting (2016–2020)*, the evidence in this brief demonstrates that the quantity of corruption-related reporting in Nigeria continues to grow, as does the quantity of corruption-related investigative reporting, though there has been a decline in the quality of investigative reporting since 2018.

Background & Methods

This learning brief contributes to answering Learning Questions 4.3 and 6.2 (see box) using media monitoring data collected since 2016. In 2021, EnCompass updated the media monitoring methodology to: (1) expand the geography and range of TV and radio sources, (2) cease collection of print media, (3) add additional filter terms and module-specific keywords to reflect On Nigeria 2.0's focus, (4) move online media monitoring to the Pulsar TRAC platform, and (5) expand digital media sampling to capture

> **Learning Questions**
> *4.3*: To what extent do media organizations produce high-quality journalism?
> *6.2*: To what extent do citizens and communities use grievance and/or accountability mechanisms?

---

[1] Quality of investigative articles is determined by scoring investigative articles on the Quality of Investigative Reporting Rubric developed for the *On Nigeria 2018 Quality of Investigative Reporting Findings: Technical Memo.* This rubric was developed with On Nigeria grantees and Nigerian media professionals. The rubric can be found in Annex 2.

corruption-related news nationwide (Annex 1). In line with the updated methodology, EnCompass and subcontractors Playspread and Pulsar identified and pulled 23,377 corruption-related segments and articles for analysis in 2021. To explore how the media reports on corruption and anticorruption, EnCompass assessed the corruption-related keywords mentioned most frequently in the overall sample, and purposively sampled 23 articles related to accountability mechanisms and anticorruption actions (Annex 3). To evaluate the quantity and quality of investigative reporting, EnCompass selected a randomized subsample of 2,000 online articles,[2] categorized them as investigative or non-investigative, and applied the Quality of Investigative Reporting Rubric to the articles in the investigative category (Annex 2).

Sample Description

The overall sample used for this analysis comprises 532 TV segments, 221 radio segments, and 22,608 online articles.[3] Grantees produced 20 percent of the online articles. These sources contain 36,534 mentions of corruption-related terms, and 4,478 mentions of On Nigeria grantees. The most frequent filter term, "corrupt," appeared in 17 percent of all traditional media and 31 percent of digital media. Overall, roughly 30 percent of the online articles published by both grantees and non-grantees mentioned corruption-related filter terms.

Exhibit 1 presents the relative frequency of different keyword categories. In traditional media, keywords associated with cross-cutting topics and the Criminal Justice module appear more frequently than those associated with other modules, and in similar proportions to each other. In contrast, for digital media, after cross-cutting keywords (48 percent), the most frequently mentioned module-specific keywords were associated with Behavior Change (27 percent).

---

[2] Due to the large number of corruption-related articles in the dataset (22,608 articles), a random subsample of online articles (1,000 each from grantee and non-grantee sources) was selected for the investigative reporting analysis. The subsample is representative of the larger data set and consistent with the sample size from previous years. From 2017-2020, grantees were invited to contribute their own investigative reports for quality assessment. In 2021, this practice was discontinued to maintain a representative sample of the Nigerian media landscape.

[3] The sample of 22,608 online articles was collected from a universe of 96,582 corruption-related news articles in Nigeria identified using Pulsar TRAC.

Exhibit 1. Proportion of module-specific and cross-cutting category keywords by traditional media (n = 753 segments) and digital media (n = 22,608 articles), 2021
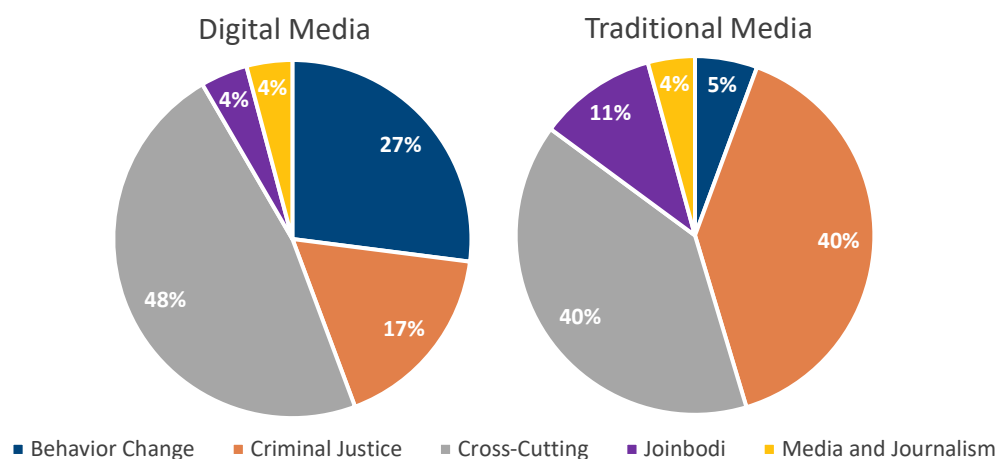

Digital Media

Traditional Media

■ Behavior Change ■ Criminal Justice ■ Cross-Cutting ■ Joinbodi ■ Media and Journalism

Exhibit 2 presents the quantity of investigative and non-investigate articles in the purposive sample for 2016-2020 and the random sample for 2021, as well as the sample distribution of articles published by grantee and non-grantee media sources. Of the 2,000 articles sampled for analysis in 2021, 253 (13 percent) were categorized as investigative, representing an increase of five percent since 2020.

Exhibit 2. Corruption-related articles produced by grantees vs. non-grantee organizations and article categories sampled for analysis of quantity and quality of investigative reporting, 2016–2021

	2016 Articles	2017 Articles	2018 Articles	2019 Articles	2020 Articles	2021 Articles[4]	Total
Grantee organization	298 (24%)	295 (45%)	645 (45%)	755 (42%)	839 (47%)	1,000 (50%)	3,832 (43%)
Non-grantee organization	968 (76%)	355 (55%)	793 (55%)	1,040 (58%)	931 (53%)	1,000 (50%)	5,087 (59%)
Investigative and Potentially Investigative[5]	6 (0.5%)	66 (10%)	164 (11%)	114 (6%)	149 (8%)	253 (13%)	752 (8%)
Non-Investigative	1,260 (99.5%)	584 (90%)	1,274 (89%)	1,681 (94%)	1,621 (92%)	1,747 (87%)	8,167 (92%)
Total	**1,266**	**650**	**1,438**	**1,795**	**1,770**	**2,000**	**8,919**

Findings

Exhibit 3 summarizes the findings.

---

[4]The proportions of grantee organizations and non-grantee organizations are not comparable due to the subsampling in the new methodology in which an even number of each were randomly sampled. Additionally, this subsampling method may have oversampled grantee online articles, which would contribute to the increase in investigative articles by grantees.
[5]Articles classified as Investigative or News Story—Potentially Investigative (also referred to as Potentially Investigative) were combined into one category for analysis for 2017–2020. In 2021, only the Investigative category was used.

Exhibit 3. Findings Summary

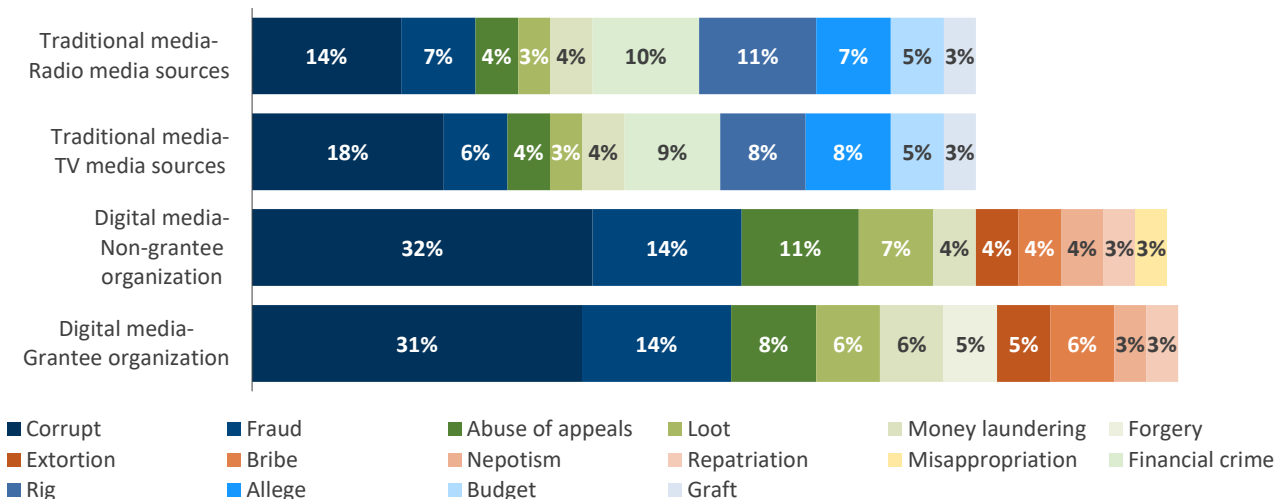| |
|---|
| **Finding 1**: *Corruption-related media most often focuses on exposing corrupt actions.* |
| **Finding 2**: *EFCC, ICPC, INEC, and SERAP are the anticorruption actors that appear most frequently in corruption-related media and are often mentioned in stories that focus on transparency, public funds, and integrity.* |
| **Finding 3**: *Digital media was more likely to mention grantees than traditional media, and articles and segments that mention grantees focus on combatting corruption. SERAP and ICPC together accounted for 33 percent of grantee mentions across all sources.* |
| **Finding 4**: *Continuing a trend from previous years, grantees produced a large proportion of corruption-related investigative articles in Nigeria in 2021.* |
| **Finding 5**: *In 2021, only 7 percent of investigative articles moderately met or met quality standards across all five investigative reporting quality domains. Throughout 2017–2021, grantees appear more likely than non-grantees to at least moderately meet standards across all domains.* |
| **Finding 6**: *There has been a decrease in grantee investigative articles meeting or moderately meeting quality standards for all domains since 2018.* |

In the text below, findings are organized around two lines of inquiry: the first describes how the media (including grantees) reported on corruption and anticorruption in 2021. The second reviews the quantity and quality of investigative reporting in 2021, including in comparison to previous years.

How the Media Reports on Corruption and Anticorruption in Nigeria

Finding 1: Corruption-related media most often focuses on exposing corrupt actions.

Exhibit 4 presents the top ten corruption-related filter terms. The frequency of these terms indicates the media's tendency to report mostly on exposing corrupt acts. An analysis of the frequency of filter terms for traditional media showed that "corrupt" was the most common, followed by "financial-crime," "rig," "allege," and "fraud." For digital media, "corrupt" was also the most common filter term, followed by "fraud," "abuse of appeals," "loot," "money laundering," and "forgery." These trends are similar across both grantee and non-grantee sources.

Exhibit 4. Top ten corruption-related filter terms as a percentage of all filter terms mentioned in traditional media and digital media (n = 36,534 filter terms).

Finding 2: EFCC, ICPC, INEC, and SERAP are the anticorruption actors that appear most frequently in corruption-related media and are often mentioned in stories that focus on transparency, public funds, and integrity.
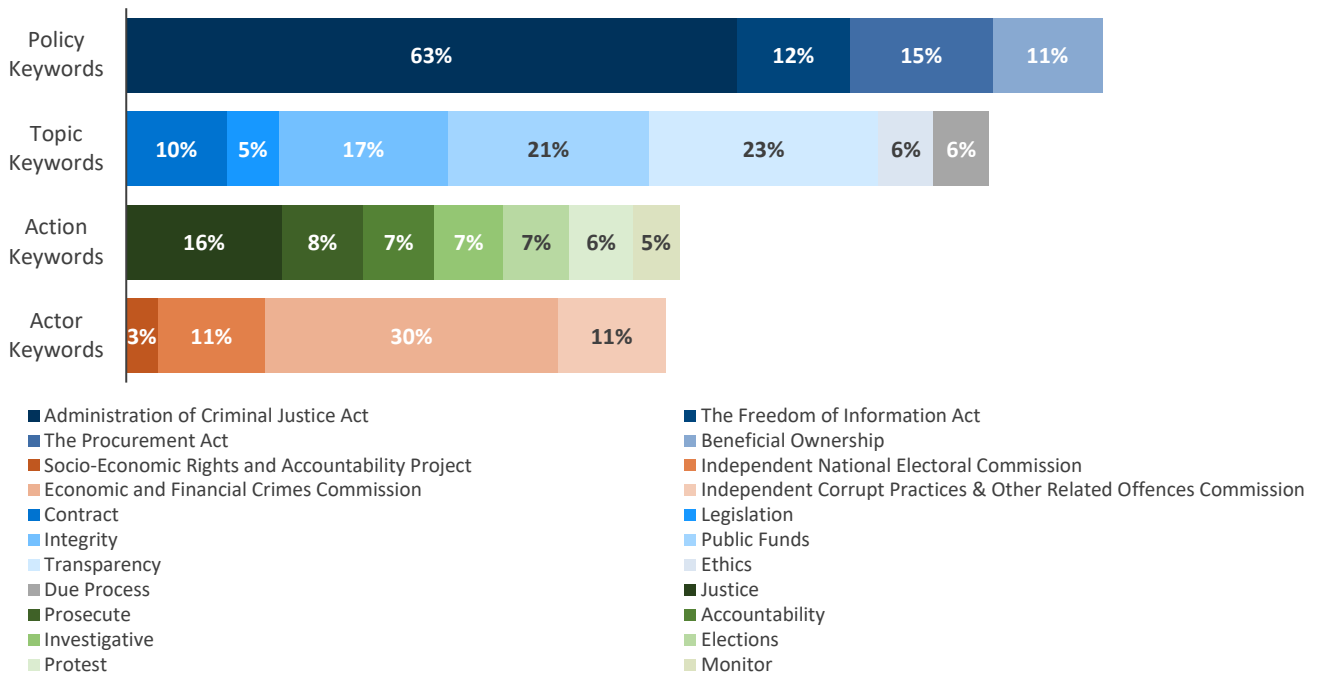
Exhibit 5 presents the anticorruption organizations, actions, topics, and policies that appear most frequently in digital media. Anticorruption digital media reporting focused, by a large margin, on the work of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), followed by actions of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP). These organizations were categorized as the "actors" that either support the use of accountability mechanisms (ICPC and SERAP) or aid in prosecuting, preventing, and rejecting corruption (EFCC, INEC, and SERAP). In the On Nigeria 2.0 Theory of Change, ICPC and EFCC (and to a lesser extent, INEC) are considered "teeth" actors, while SERAP is a "voice" actor.

Exhibit 5. Most frequently mentioned anticorruption keywords in digital media (n = 22,608 articles) for the actor, actions, topics, and policies categories.
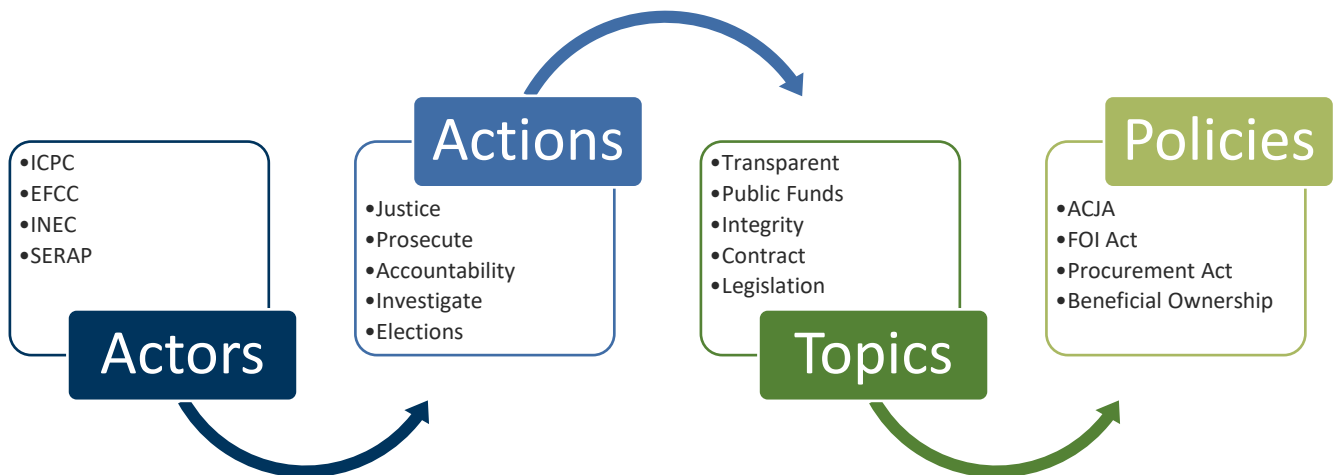
"Actions" were defined as corruption-related work performed by anticorruption organizations. "Justice" is the top action-related keyword associated with each of the four actors (Exhibit 6). The next most common action-related keyword for EFCC and ICPC was "investigate," followed by "prosecute" for EFCC and "accountability" for ICPC. For INEC, the most common action-related keywords were "elections" and "protest," while for SERAP, the most common keywords were "accountability" and "prosecute." Regarding corruption-related topics, the most frequently mentioned keywords for all four top anticorruption actors were "public funds," "transparent," and "integrity," and the most common policy mentioned was the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA). ICPC was also frequently mentioned with The Procurement Act and SERAP was mentioned the most with the Freedom of Information Act.
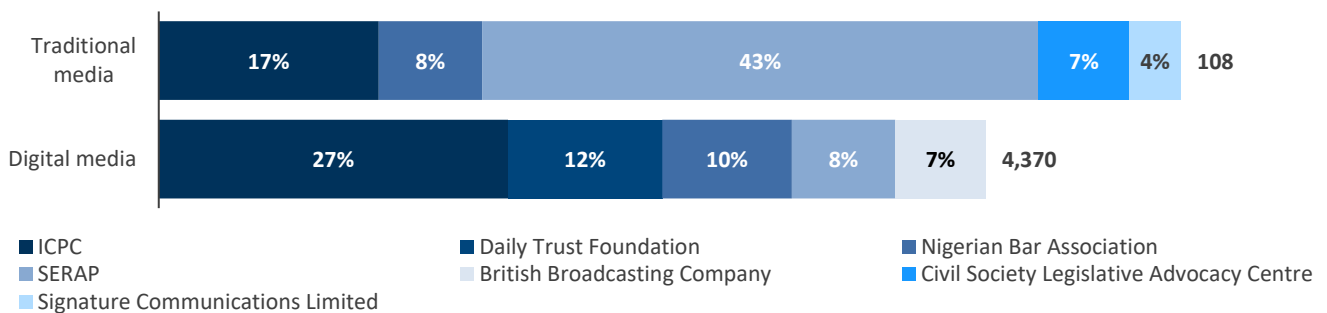
Exhibit 6. Top corruption-related filter terms and keywords in digital media (n = 22,608 articles) categorized by actors, actions, topics, and policies.

- ■ Administration of Criminal Justice Act
- ■ The Procurement Act
- ■ Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project
- ■ Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
- ■ Contract
- ■ Integrity
- ■ Transparency
- ■ Due Process
- ■ Prosecute
- ■ Investigative
- ■ Protest

- ■ The Freedom of Information Act
- ■ Beneficial Ownership
- ■ Independent National Electoral Commission
- ■ Independent Corrupt Practices & Other Related Offences Commission
- ■ Legislation
- ■ Public Funds
- ■ Ethics
- ■ Justice
- ■ Accountability
- ■ Elections
- ■ Monitor

Finding 3: Digital media was more likely to mention grantees than traditional media, and articles and segments that mention grantees focus on combatting corruption. SERAP and ICPC together accounted for 33 percent of grantee mentions across all sources.

Nineteen percent of digital media articles mention grantees.[6] Criminal Justice grantees are mentioned more often than grantees from other modules, with ICPC appearing most frequently (27 percent of grantee mentions). In contrast, only 14 percent of traditional media segments mention grantees. Joinbodi grantees appear more frequently than others in the traditional media, with SERAP receiving the most mentions by far (43 percent of grantee mentions), followed by ICPC (17 percent) (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7. Proportion of grantee mentions in traditional media and digital media for the most frequently mentioned grantees (n = 4,478 grantee mentions)

- ■ ICPC
- ■ SERAP
- ■ Signature Communications Limited

- ■ Daily Trust Foundation
- ■ British Broadcasting Company

- ■ Nigerian Bar Association
- ■ Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre

---

[6] More than one grantee could be mentioned in each digital media article, but only one grantee could be mentioned per traditional media segment due to the data collection limitations.

ICPC and SERAP are likely mentioned frequently in both types of media due to their prominence in the accountability ecosystem in Nigeria—ICPC is the fundamental accountability body and SERAP is a prominent NGO focused on leveraging human rights laws to hold the government to account (see box for examples of how grantees appear in the media).
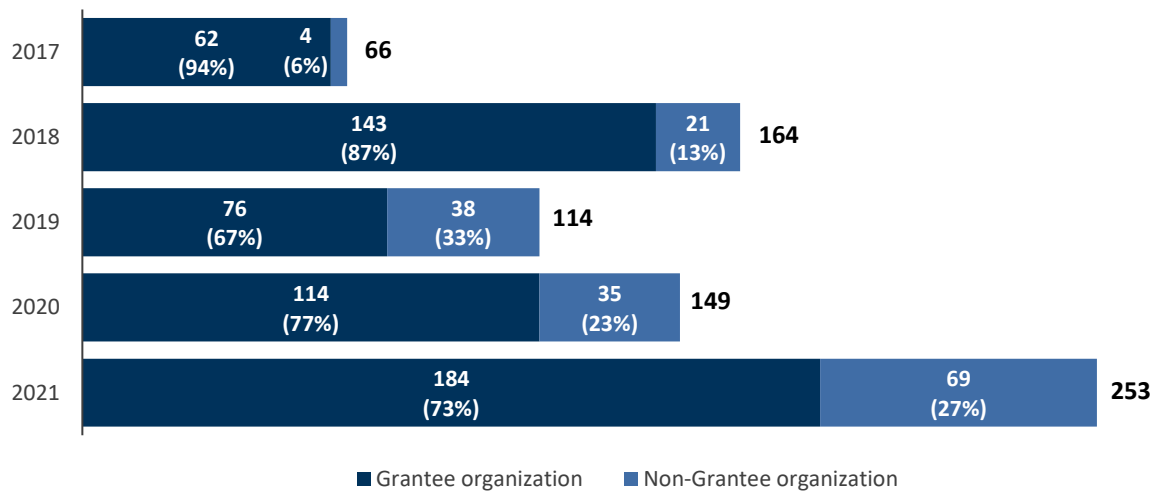
Quantity and Quality of Investigative Journalism

Finding 4: Continuing a trend from previous years, grantees produced a large proportion of corruption-related investigative articles in Nigeria in 2021.

Of the potentially investigative and investigative articles in 2021, grantees published 184 articles (73 percent) while non-grantees published 69 articles (27 percent)—an increase from 47 percent in 2020. Exhibit 8 demonstrates the persistence of this trend since 2017, even as the number of investigative articles continues to grow.

Exhibit 8. Quantity and distribution of potentially investigative (2017–2020) and investigative articles (2017–2021) by grantee and non-grantee organizations (n = 746 articles).

Year	Grantee organization	Non-Grantee organization	Total
2017	62 (94%)	4 (6%)	66
2018	143 (87%)	21 (13%)	164
2019	76 (67%)	38 (33%)	114
2020	114 (77%)	35 (23%)	149
2021	184 (73%)	69 (27%)	253

■ Grantee organization   ■ Non-Grantee organization

Finding 5: In 2021, only 7 percent of investigative articles moderately met or met quality standards across all five investigative reporting quality domains. Throughout 2017–2021, grantees appear more likely than non-grantees to at least moderately meet standards across all domains.

Of the 253 investigative articles analyzed for quality for 2021, only seven percent moderately met standards (score of 3) for all five domains. This represents a reduction from previous years (Exhibit 9), in each of which roughly one-quarter of investigative or potentially investigative articles

moderately met or met all five quality standards. In 2021, 17 percent of articles met some aspects of the standards (score of 2) across all five domains.

Although most 2021 articles did not meet the standards for all five domains, a greater proportion of grantee investigative articles moderately met standards (score of 3) for all five domains in comparison to non-grantee articles. Eleven percent of grantee articles met some aspects of the standards across all five domains, compared to six percent of non-grantee articles.
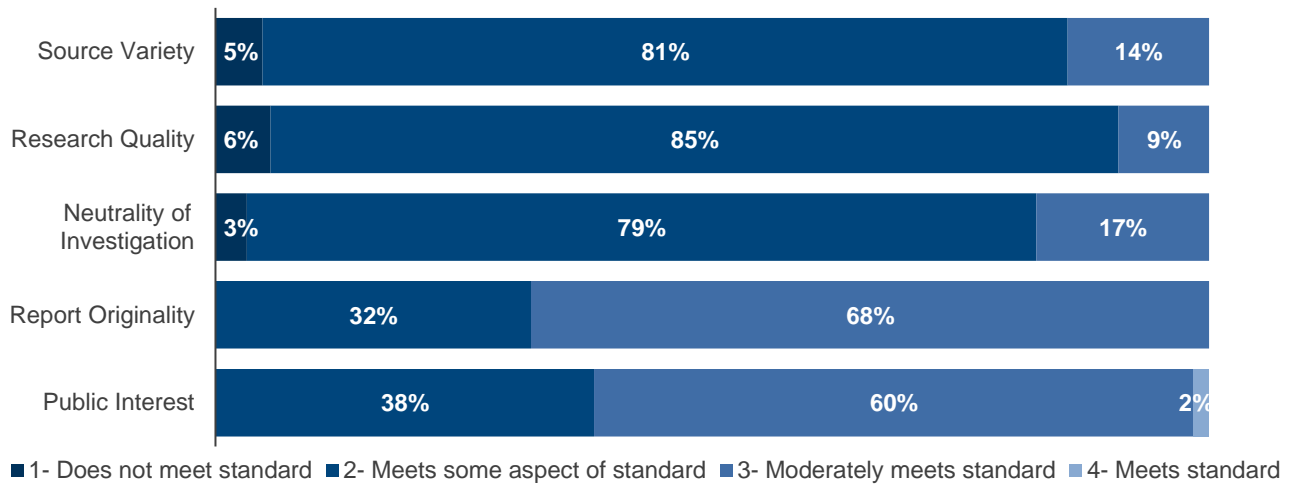
Exhibit 9. Proportion of potentially investigative articles (2017–2020) and investigative articles (2017–2021) moderately meeting or meeting quality standards (score of 3 or 4) across all five domains (n = 746 articles) [7]

- ■ Grantee organizations' articles that moderately met or met standards across all five domains
- ■ Non-grantee organizations' articles that moderately met or met standards across all five domains
- ■ Articles that did not meet standards across all five domains
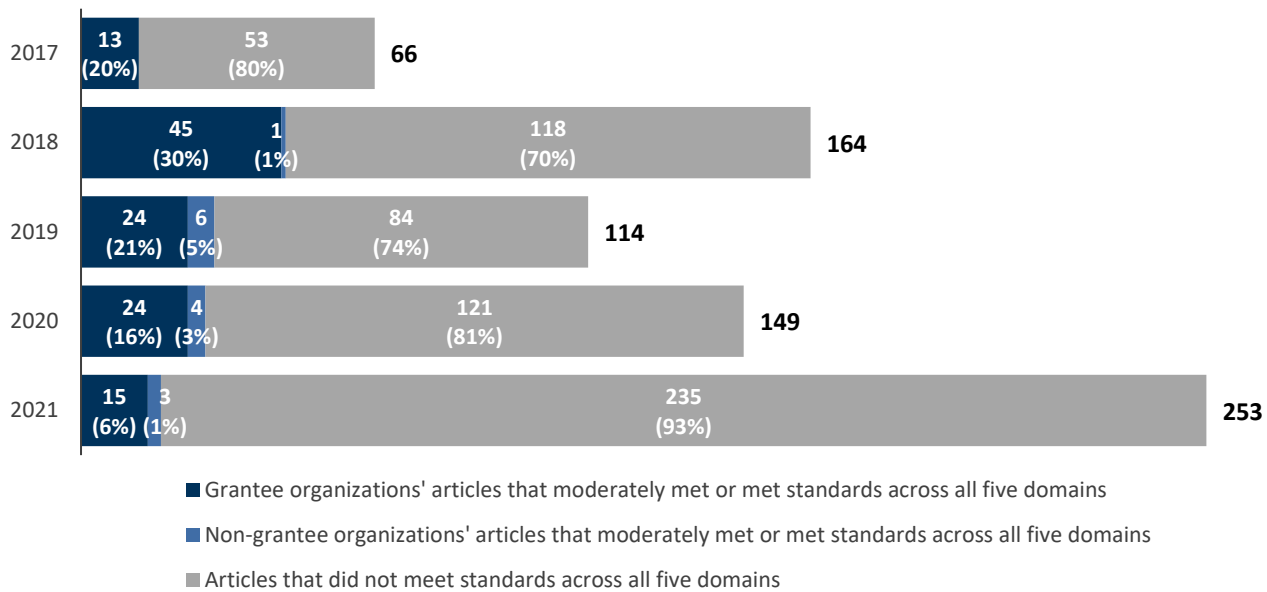
Continuing a trend from 2017 to 2020, investigative articles in 2021 scored the highest on the Report Originality and Public Interest domains, with 68 percent and 60 percent of articles moderately meeting the quality standards, respectively. Two percent of articles met the standard for Public Interest. More than 75 percent of investigative articles met some aspects of the quality standards for Research Quality (85 percent), Source Variety (81 percent), and Neutrality of Investigation (79 percent). There were no articles that exceeded standards for any of the domains (Exhibit 10).

---

[7] In a change from previous years, in 2021 the Media and Journalism grantees were not asked to contribute their own investigative reports to the quality of investigative reporting sample. Instead, a subset of online articles was randomly sampled from the purposive media monitoring dataset and distributed evenly across grantee and non-grantee media sources. This methodology change creates a more representative sample for analysis but, it may miss higher quality articles that grantees would have submitted. This may contribute to some of the quality decline observed in 2021.

Exhibit 10. Proportion of investigative article scoring on quality standards by domain, 2021 (grantees and non-grantees combined, n = 253 articles)

Domain	1- Does not meet standard	2- Meets some aspect of standard	3- Moderately meets standard	4- Meets standard
Source Variety	5%	81%	14%	
Research Quality	6%	85%	9%	
Neutrality of Investigation	3%	79%	17%	
Report Originality		32%	68%	
Public Interest		38%	60%	2%

■ 1- Does not meet standard ■ 2- Meets some aspect of standard ■ 3- Moderately meets standard ■ 4- Meets standard

Relative to non-grantee articles, grantee articles appeared more likely to at least moderately meet standards for Report Originality and Public Interest and appeared slightly more likely to meet at least some aspects of the quality standards for Source Variety, Research Quality, and Neutrality of Investigation. Grantee articles also appear more likely to meet quality standards for all domains.

Finding 6: There has been a decrease in grantee investigative articles meeting or moderately meeting quality standards for all domains since 2018.

In terms of quality over time, 2018 had the most grantee investigative articles that moderately met or met standards for all individual domains, though 2017 had a high proportion of articles that moderately met or met standards for Public Interest and Report Originality (Exhibit 11). The proportion of grantee investigative articles that moderately met or met the standards for Public Interest and Report Originality domains dropped slightly between 2020 and 2021. Performance on other standards declined further, from 58 percent to 16 percent (Source Variety), 54 percent to 18 percent (Neutrality), and 52 percent to 10 percent (Research Quality).

Exhibit 11. Proportion of grantee articles moderately meeting (score of 3) and meeting (score of 4) the quality standard for each domain, 2017–2021 (n = 591 grantee articles)
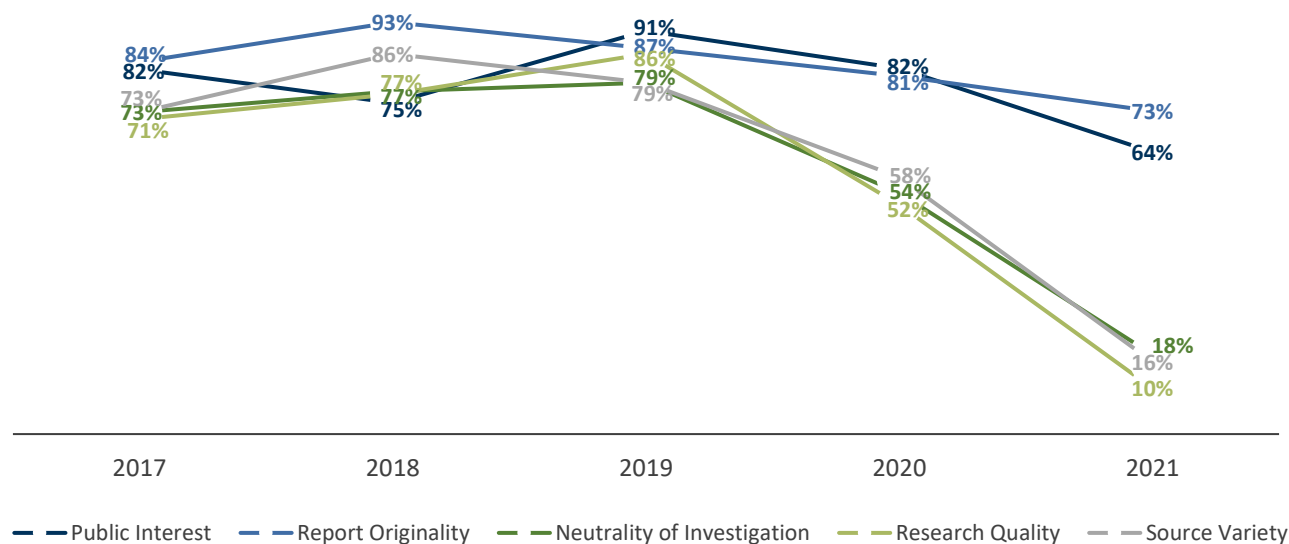
Conclusions

Conclusion 1: There was a significant amount of corruption-related media in 2021, much of which mentioned anticorruption actors and actions. Some key actors in the On Nigeria–centered network, including grantee organizations such as SERAP and ICPC, appear frequently in the media. (Aligned with Findings 1, 2, and 3)

In 2021, corruption-related traditional and digital media in Nigeria focused on exposing corrupt acts, with many stories also mentioning anticorruption actors, their actions, the topics on which they work, and the policies for which they advocate and/or support. Several network actors, including teeth actors like EFCC and ICPC, as well as INEC, and voice actors like SERAP, are particularly prominent in such stories. These actors' prevalence in the media is likely due, in part, to their functions and responsibilities. For example, as the electoral oversight body charged with ensuring transparent and accountable elections, INEC would be expected to feature heavily in articles on corruption and anticorruption, especially leading up to the 2023 elections. ICPC and EFCC are key oversight bodies that conduct investigations and would be expected to appear in stories covering the use and recovery of public funds, while SERAP engages in litigation and advocacy related to corruption.

The prominence of these organizations in the media may also reflect their roles in the overall accountability ecosystem in Nigeria. For example, ICPC and EFCC are central hubs in the On Nigeria–centered network discussed in the October 2022 *Social Network Analysis Report*. These organizations are highly connected players in the accountability ecosystem in Nigeria. As such, ICPC and EFCC – and potentially, SERAP and INEC – may be particularly well placed to exert influence on their respective domains, drive more media attention on anticorruption efforts, and encourage even more and broader action against corruption in the future.

Conclusion 2: Grantees continue to produce the bulk of investigative and potentially investigative reports, but overall, quality remains low and appears to be declining. The reasons behind this trend warrant further exploration. *(Aligned with Findings 4, 5, and 6)*

Consistent with previous years, grantees continue to produce the bulk of investigative journalism in the media monitoring sample and are responsible for the majority of articles that at least moderately meet quality standards across all five domains. Overall, however, the quality of investigative articles remains highly variable. Across the sample, some investigative articles moderately met standards for Public Interest, Research Quality, Report Originality, Neutrality of Investigation, and Source Variety, but only a few met all of these quality standards. Performance on the Source Variety, Research Quality, and Neutrality of Investigation standards has the greatest room for growth.

The investigative reporting data from 2021 revealed an increasing trend in the quantity of investigative articles, but a declining trend in the quality. Since 2018, the quality of investigative articles produced by grantees and non-grantees has dropped, especially in the case of Source Variety, Report Originality, and Neutrality of Investigation. While a change in the 2021 sampling methodology may account for some of this reduction, further exploration of the drivers behind diminishing quality may be warranted.

Learning Considerations

During separate learning events focused on the evidence presented in this brief, the Program Team and On Nigeria grantees both noted the importance of further strengthening corruption-related reporting (including high quality investigative reporting) before On Nigeria's end in 2024. The upcoming *Learning Brief 5 – Amplifying Investigative Reporting* will further investigate the ways in which grantees currently think about, and seek to support, high quality investigative journalism. In the meantime, as the Program Team considers how to strengthen the connection between reporting and anticorruption action in the Nigerian context, reflecting on the questions below (versions of some of which featured in *Learning Brief #3—Quality Of Investigative Reporting (2016–2020)*) may be warranted.

1. *What are the drivers of the observed decline in the quality of investigative reporting? What challenges contribute to the decline, and how might they be addressed? How might reflecting on the quality of investigative reporting rubric – in its current form, or potentially with updates – help grantees strengthen their work regarding the quality and sustainability of investigative reporting (if at all)?*

2. *Do the Program Team and grantees feel the focus needs to continue to be on both the quantity of corruption-related journalism AND the quality of investigative reporting? Where are grantees best positioned to focus their own efforts?*

3. *What is the role of grantees in contributing to a sustainable media ecosystem – should they focus on producing more corruption-related journalism and/or high-quality investigative reporting, building the capacity of others to perform these functions, or both? And how is the Foundation best positioned to support grantees, including in collaboration with grantee and, potentially, non-grantee media organizations, especially as we move towards 2024 and beyond?*