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Introduction

The MacArthur Foundation’s Big Bet On Nigeria program has sought to build the capacity of local media organizations and journalists to produce corruption-related journalism. By improving the quantity and quality of reporting on corruption, On Nigeria hopes to increase citizen awareness of corruption and engagement in anticorruption efforts, and pressure government officials to take action to ensure accountability.

This learning brief – which builds on *Learning Brief 6: Media Monitoring (2016-2021)* – uses media monitoring data collected since 2016 to explore Learning Questions 4.3 and 6.2, as well as Learning Priority 3 (see box). Specifically, the brief presents evidence on how the media reported on corruption in Nigeria in 2022 and 2023, and assesses the quantity and quality of investigative reporting in Nigeria from 2017 to 2023.

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?

Learning Priority

- 3. What is the most effective balance between the quantity and quality of corruption-related reporting (especially investigative reporting)?

Overview

The evidence presented in this brief demonstrates that the quantity of corruption-related reporting in Nigeria remained high in recent years, particularly around the 2023 elections. This suggests that, in line with the On Nigeria Theory of Change, media organizations continue to invest in, and produce, considerable amounts of journalism focused on corruption. The investigative reporting data shows that, though the quantity of corruption-related investigative reporting remained somewhat static between 2017 and 2023, quality appears to have declined in recent years. While the reasons driving

this drop in quality are unclear, additional support for skill building on investigative reporting may be warranted. Exhibit 1 summarizes key findings and conclusions.

Exhibit 1. Evidence Summary

Findings on Corruption Related Reporting

Finding 1: *Similar to 2021, in 2022 and 2023, corruption-related media continues to focus on exposing corrupt actions. The topic of corruption in elections was more prominent in 2022 and 2023 than in previous years.*

Finding 2: *EFCC, ICPC, INEC, and SERAP continue to be the most frequently mentioned anticorruption actors in corruption-related media in 2022 and 2023, particularly in stories focused on due process, political will, and public procurement.*

Finding 3: *Grantee mentions in traditional media have grown since 2021. In digital media, the proportion of articles that mention grantees declines between 2021 and 2022, but grows considerably in 2023. ICPC and SERAP continue to account for a sizeable proportion of grantee mentions in media in both years, though mentions of Daily Trust and ICIR increased substantially in 2023.*

Findings on Investigative Reporting

Finding 4: *The proportion of investigative articles produced by non-grantees grew considerably between 2017 (4 percent) and 2023 (32 percent), reaching a high of 39 percent in 2022.*

Finding 5: *The percentage of investigative articles at least moderately¹ meeting standards of quality appears to peak in 2018 and 2019 and begins to decline thereafter. This is true of investigative articles produced by both grantees and non-grantees.*

Finding 6: *Overall, grantee investigative articles tend to at least moderately meet standards in each individual domain, although this is less true of the Public Interest domain. Within each domain, however, there appears to be a general decline in the quality of investigative articles over time (though some domains saw increases in 2023 relative to 2022). Differences in quality for specific domains have narrowed between grantee and non-grantee articles in recent years.*

Overall Conclusions

Conclusion 1: *There continues to be a substantial amount of corruption-related reporting in Nigeria, and in 2022 and 2023, several On Nigeria grantees—including ICPC, SERAP, and Daily Trust—featured prominently in the media, as did key anticorruption actors like EFCC and INEC. Reporting on elections increased considerably in 2022 and 2023, relative to previous years.*

Conclusion 2: *The proportion of investigative articles produced by non-grantees has grown considerably since 2017. The overall quality of investigative reports, however, appears to be declining, even as the quality gap between non-grantees and grantees narrows. Further exploration may be warranted to determine and address the drivers of these trends.*

Background & Methods

The EL Partner co-created the media monitoring methodology with the Evaluation Office, the Program Team, and Media and Journalism grantees under On Nigeria 1.0, and has updated and implemented it on a regular basis since 2017. In 2022 and 2023, EnCompass adjusted the media monitoring methodology to: (1) continue refining module-specific keywords to ensure the most relevant actors, actions, topics, and policies related to On Nigeria 2.0 are captured and analyzed (Annex 1), and (2) incorporate partner feedback into the Quality of Investigative Reporting (QIR)

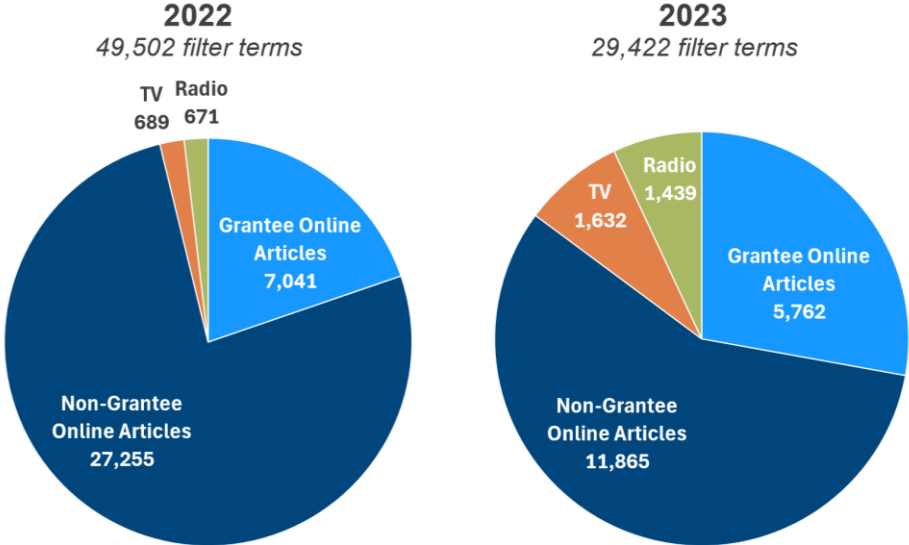
¹ The phrase “at least moderately meeting” in this finding refers to articles that received a score of three, four, or five in all five domains of the QIR rubric outlined in Annex 2.

Rubric (Annex 2). In line with the updated methodology, EnCompass and subcontractors Playspread and Pulsar identified and pulled 35,656 and 20,698 corruption-related articles and segments in 2022 and 2023, respectively. To better understand the content of corruption-related reports, EnCompass also identified the corruption-related keywords mentioned most frequently in the overall sample each year, and purposively selected and reviewed 48 articles and segments related to six topic areas that are essential to the On Nigeria Theory of Change (Annex 3). To evaluate the quantity and quality of investigative reporting in 2022 and 2023, EnCompass selected a random subsample of 2,000 online articles, categorized them as investigative or non-investigative, and applied the updated QIR Rubric to score the articles in the investigative category.²

Sample Description

Exhibit 2 summarizes the sample used for the overall analysis presented in this brief. The 2022 sample comprises 689 TV segments, 671 radio segments, and 34,296 online articles (grantees produced 21 percent of the online articles), and the 2023 sample comprises 1,632 TV segments, 1,439 radio segments, and 17,627 online articles (grantees produced 33 percent of the online articles). In 2022, 49,502 corruption-related filter terms were tagged, versus 29,422 in 2023, while On Nigeria grantees were mentioned 5,916 times in 2022 and 5,865 times in 2023.³

Exhibit 2. Proportion of TV and radio segments, and grantee/non-grantee online articles in the 2022 and 2023 media monitoring sample, identified by corruption-related filter terms



² As part of this, all articles from 2016 to 2021 were re-categorized and re-scored according to the updated QIR Rubric.

³ The drop in the total number of articles between 2022 and 2023 may be due to updates in the Boolean search in Pulsar used to collect articles, which was revised in April 2023 after an audit of incoming data found that too many irrelevant articles were being collected. The names of the news organizations in the purposive sample were added to the search at this time, which may also account for the steady number of grantee mentions despite the difference in sample size.

In digital media, the proportion of keywords by module was similar in 2022 and 2023, but varied considerably from 2021, in which Behavior Change keywords appeared more frequently. In traditional media, key word proportions by module were broadly consistent in 2021 and 2022, but Criminal Justice keywords became much more prevalent in 2023 (Exhibit 3). The growth in keywords associated with criminal justice may reflect the media’s focus on the 2023 elections, which were marred by corruption allegations, as well as several major corruption inquiries and scandals that took place in 2023.⁴

Exhibit 3. Proportion of module-specific and cross-cutting category keywords by traditional media (n = 5,184 segments) and digital media (n = 74,531 articles), 2021–2023

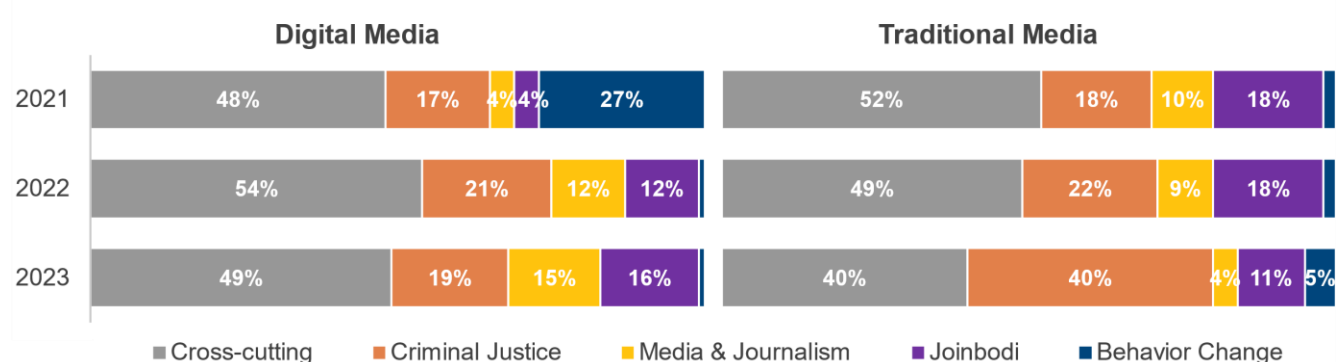


Exhibit 4 presents the quantity of investigative and non-investigative articles, as well as the sample distribution of investigative and non-investigative articles published by grantee and non-grantee media sources from 2016 to 2023. Of the 2,000 articles sampled for analysis in 2022 and in 2023, 6 and 7 percent, respectively, were categorized as investigative. These percentages are similar to 2019 through 2021 but represent a slight decrease from 2017 and 2018.

Exhibit 4. Corruption-related articles produced by grantee vs. non-grantee organizations and article categories sampled for analysis of quantity and quality of investigative reporting, 2016–2023

	2016 Articles	2017 Articles	2018 Articles	2019 Articles	2020 Articles	2021 Articles	2022 Articles	2023 Articles	Total
Grantee organization	298 (24%)	295 (45%)	645 (45%)	755 (42%)	839 (47%)	1,000 (50%)	1,000 (50%)	1,000 (50%)	5,832 (45%)
Non-grantee organization	968 (76%)	355 (55%)	793 (55%)	1,040 (58%)	931 (53%)	1,000 (50%)	1,000 (50%)	1,000 (50%)	7,087 (55%)
Investigative	3 (0.2%)	51 (8%)	129 (9%)	85 (5%)	107 (6%)	94 (5%)	113 (6%)	142 (7%)	724 (6%)
Non-Investigative	1,263 (99.7%)	599 (92%)	1,309 (91%)	1,710 (95%)	1,663 (94%)	1,906 (95%)	1,887 (94%)	1,858 (93%)	12,195 (94%)
Total	1,266	650	1,438	1,795	1,770	2,000	2,000	2,000	12,919

⁴ These include the ongoing investigation of a former central bank governor, charges being filed against several current and former ministers for financial mismanagement and abuse of power, and the scandal-plagued rollout of a new Naira.

Findings

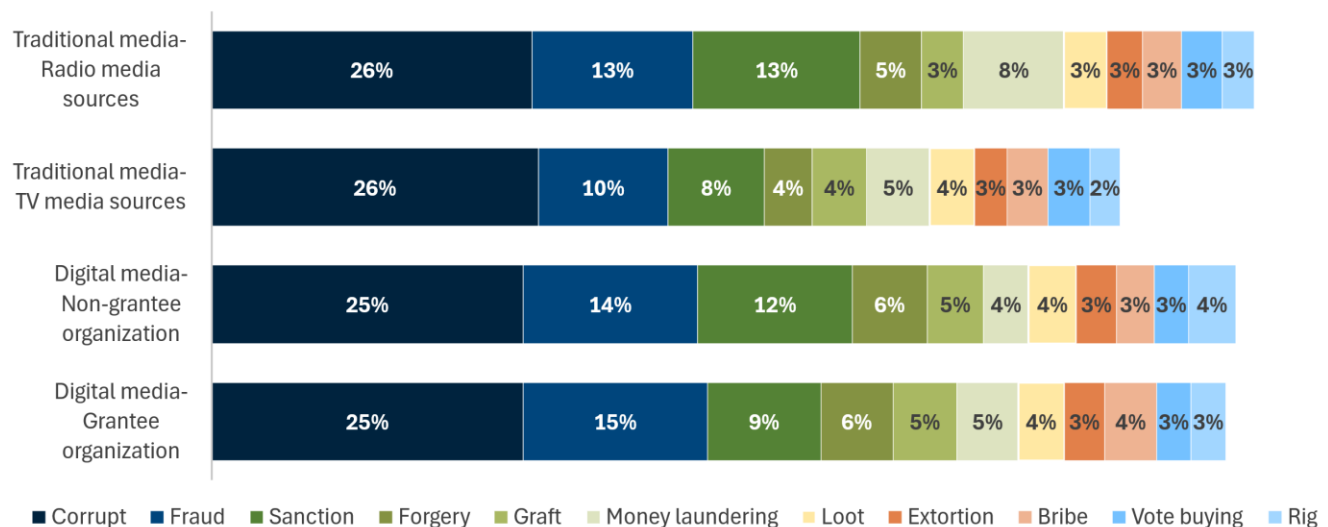
In the text below, findings are organized around two lines of inquiry: the first describes how the media (including grantees) reported on corruption and anticorruption in 2022 and 2023, relative to 2021.⁵ The second reviews the quantity and quality of investigative reporting in 2022 and 2023, and compares to previous years.⁶

How the Media Reports on Corruption and Anticorruption in Nigeria

Finding 1: Similar to 2021, in 2022 and 2023, corruption-related media continues to focus on exposing corrupt actions. The topic of corruption in elections was more prominent in 2022 and 2023.

Exhibit 5 presents the top ten corruption-related filter terms mentioned in articles in 2022 and 2023. Analysis of the frequency of filter terms for traditional media showed that “corrupt” remains the most common, followed by “fraud,” “sanction,” “money laundering,” and “forgery.” For digital media, the same terms were found in slightly different order: “corrupt” was the most common filter term, followed by “fraud,” “sanction,” “forgery,” and “money laundering.” These trends are similar across both grantee and non-grantee sources (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. Top ten corruption-related filter terms as a percentage of all filter terms mentioned in traditional and digital media in 2022 and 2023 (n = 78,578 filter terms)



⁵ Data on how the media reports on corruption and anticorruption is compared across 2021 to 2023 only because the filter terms and keywords and the methods for tagging and analyzing them in On Nigeria 1.0 were too different to On Nigeria 2.0 for comparison to earlier years.

⁶ The quantity and quality of investigative reporting are compared from 2017 to 2023, because the QIR methodology in On Nigeria 2.0 has been applied to data from On Nigeria 1.0, making the data comparable.

There was some variation in top filter terms across the years. “Sanction,” “graft,” and “non-remittance” increased in frequency in 2022, while in 2023 “rig” and “vote buying” entered the top ten list. The buildup to 2023 elections, and the accusations and petitions that followed, are likely drivers of these trends (see box). Some filter terms have consistently been mentioned quite frequently over the years including “corrupt,” “fraud,” “loot,” “money laundering,” “forgery,” “graft,” “extortion,” and “bribe.”

Snapshot: Reporting related to Elections

The elections were a frequent topic in corruption-related reporting. In 2022 several opinion articles by prominent Nigerians discussed candidates and their personal ideals for the upcoming election, and these opinions varied from hopeful that the new Electoral Act would bring an end to electoral malpractice to believing that the new Act changed nothing. Others focused on warning the public to be wary of vote buying and candidates who encourage the sale of votes. In 2023, in contrast, articles on elections focused on accusations against the APC for committing electoral malpractice, INEC complicity in these acts, and protests and petitions against the election results.

Looking deeper, in 2022 and 2023, bribery was found to be of particular importance in articles mentioning public service delivery. For example, both digital and traditional media reported on bribery disrupting the delivery of public services through poor governance and systemic corruption in government agencies, while a few reports covered three separate awards given to police officers in 2022 celebrating their refusal to accept bribes.

The frequency of these filter terms, and the number of articles and segments that mention topics related to corruption, suggest that – as hoped by the On Nigeria Theory of Change - many journalists and media organizations are engaging in general reporting on corruption allegations and anticorruption successes, including on issues related to historically marginalized groups (see box).

Snapshot: Reporting on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Several corruption-related articles and segments expressed concern for the long-term effects of corruption on youth and how their views on these matters are molded by the actions of current leadership. As one article put it, *“Mr el-Rufai, who served as the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in the former President Olusegun Obasanjo administration, added that it [pardoning individuals convicted of corruption] sent the wrong signal not only to those engaging in corruption but also to young people who may now think there is a reward in being corrupt.”* Some traditional media segments also highlighted successful youth programming in building livelihoods and speaking against gender-based and sexual violence.

Finding 2: EFCC, ICPC, INEC, and SERAP continue to be the most frequently mentioned anticorruption actors in corruption-related media in 2022 and 2023, particularly in stories focused on due process, political will, and public procurement.

In 2022 and 2023, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) continued to be the anticorruption actors that appear most frequently in media (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6. Most frequently mentioned anticorruption keywords in digital media (n = 51,923 articles) for the actor, actions, topics, and policies categories in 2022 and 2023



Stories highlighted these organizations’ actions in investigation, justice, sanctions, and transparency on topics such as due process, political will, and public procurement. For example, several reports called upon ICPC and EFCC to carry out their investigation, arrest, and prosecution functions. Other stories explain that these two agencies collaborated throughout 2022 and 2023 on illicit financial flows, vote buying, and—with INEC—upholding election standards.

Stories in 2021 also focused on actions in justice and investigation, but were more likely to discuss topics like public funds, integrity, and contracts. The corruption-related policies reported on the most in 2021, 2022, and 2023 were similar, with the ACJA and Freedom of Information Action topping the list, though in 2022 and 2023 general legislation was more frequently mentioned than specific policies like the Procurement Act and Beneficial Ownership.

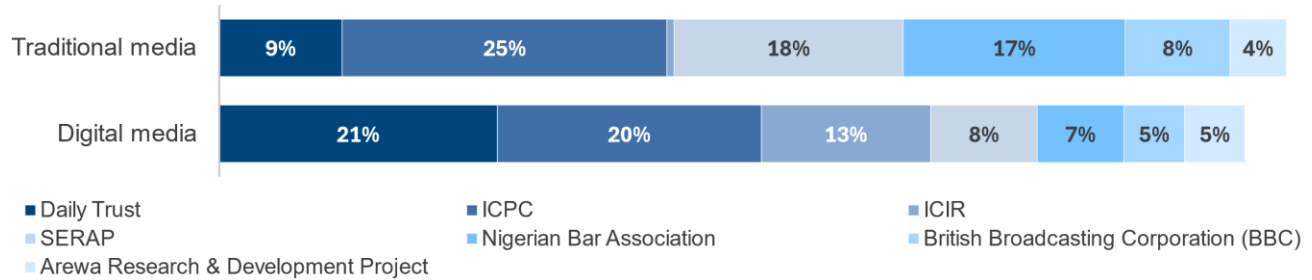
Finding 3: Grantee mentions in traditional media have grown since 2021. In digital media, the proportion of articles that mention grantees declines between 2021 and 2022, but grows considerably in 2023. ICPC and SERAP continue to account for a sizeable proportion of grantee mentions in media, but mentions of Daily Trust and ICIR increased substantially in 2023.

In 2022 and 2023, 22 percent and 23 percent of traditional media segments, respectively, mentioned grantees. This is a substantial increase from 2021, in which only 14 percent of traditional media segments mentioned grantees. In digital media, a trend is less clear. 19 percent of digital media articles mentioned grantees in 2021. 15 percent did so in 2022, versus 25 percent in 2023.

ICPC was the most frequently mentioned grantee across both types of media, where it was often lauded for its work on improving the administration of justice in the country, hosting summits on corruption in education, and preparing to combat vote buying. However, ICPC was not above criticism and was accused of mishandling some cases, as well as not doing enough on election day 2023 to prevent electoral misconduct. The next most frequently mentioned grantees were Daily Trust, SERAP, Nigerian Bar Association, and, to a lesser extent, ICIR (Exhibit 7). While Daily Trust and ICIR tended to mention themselves, media commonly reported on SERAP’s actions fighting on behalf of citizens’ rights and filing lawsuits, including calling upon ICPC to investigate and prosecute

electoral misconduct following the 2023 election. The frequency of these grantee mentions is broadly similar to 2021, though organizations like ICIR are more prominent in the more recent data.

Exhibit 7. Proportion of grantee mentions in traditional and digital media for the most frequently mentioned grantees in 2022 and 2023 (n = 11,772 grantee mentions)

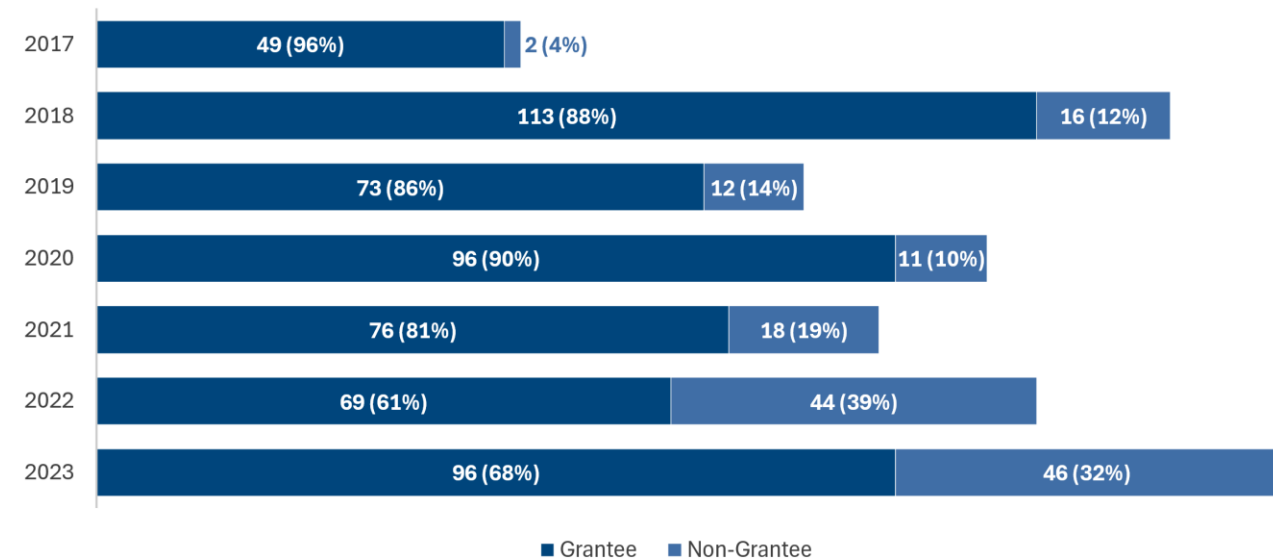


Quantity and Quality of Investigative Journalism

Finding 4: The proportion of investigative articles produced by non-grantees grew considerably between 2017 (4 percent) and 2023 (32 percent), reaching a high of 39 percent in 2022.

The proportion of articles classified as investigative fluctuates between 2017 and 2023 (ranging from as low as 5 percent in 2019 and 2021 to as high as 9 percent in 2018). Grantees consistently account for the majority of these articles, but the proportion of investigative articles produced by non-grantees has grown from around 4 percent in 2017 to 39 percent and 32 percent in 2022 and 2023, respectively (Exhibit 8). This may suggest that grantees are making progress in their efforts to build the capacity of other media organizations to engage in investigative reporting.

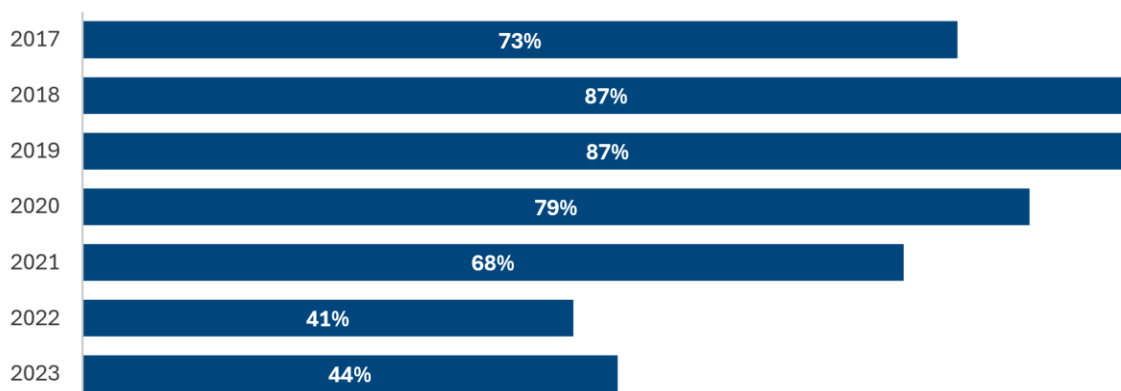
Exhibit 8. Quantity and distribution of investigative articles (2017–2023) by grantee and non-grantee organizations (n = 721 articles)



Finding 5: The percentage of investigative articles that at least moderately meeting standards of quality appears to peak in 2018 and 2019 and begins to decline thereafter. This true of investigative articles produced by both grantees and non-grantees.

In the 2017 to 2021 period, more than 50 percent of investigative articles *at least moderately met* quality standards across all five domains of the QIR rubric. In 2022 (41 percent) and 2023 (44 percent), fewer articles met this threshold (Exhibit 9). The proportion of investigative articles *meeting or exceeding standards* also declines in this period, falling from a high of 27 percent in 2019 to a low of 1 percent in 2022, before slightly rebounding to 9 percent in 2023.⁷

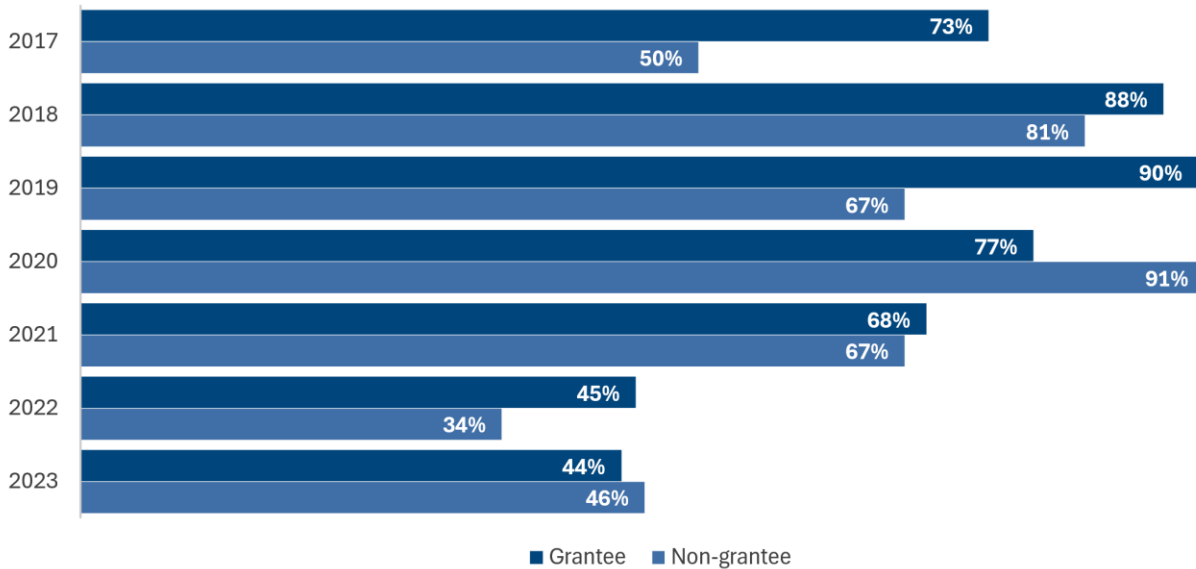
Exhibit 9. Distribution of investigative articles at least moderately meeting standards across all quality domains (2017–2023) (n = 721 articles)



In every year except 2020 and 2023, grantee articles were more likely to *at least moderately meet* quality standards across all domains than non-grantee articles. The difference in the proportions of articles at least moderately meeting standards for each group fluctuates, but begins to narrow after 2020, and are more less equal in 2021 (grantees outperform non-grantees by 1 percent) and 2023 (non-grantees outperform grantees by 2 percent). Notably, the quality of articles produced by both groups dips in 2022 and 2023 (Exhibit 10).

⁷ In 2023 this may be partly due to the fact that many articles were inconsistent in the extent to which they met the standards across all domains, meaning that an individual article’s scores varied from domain to domain.

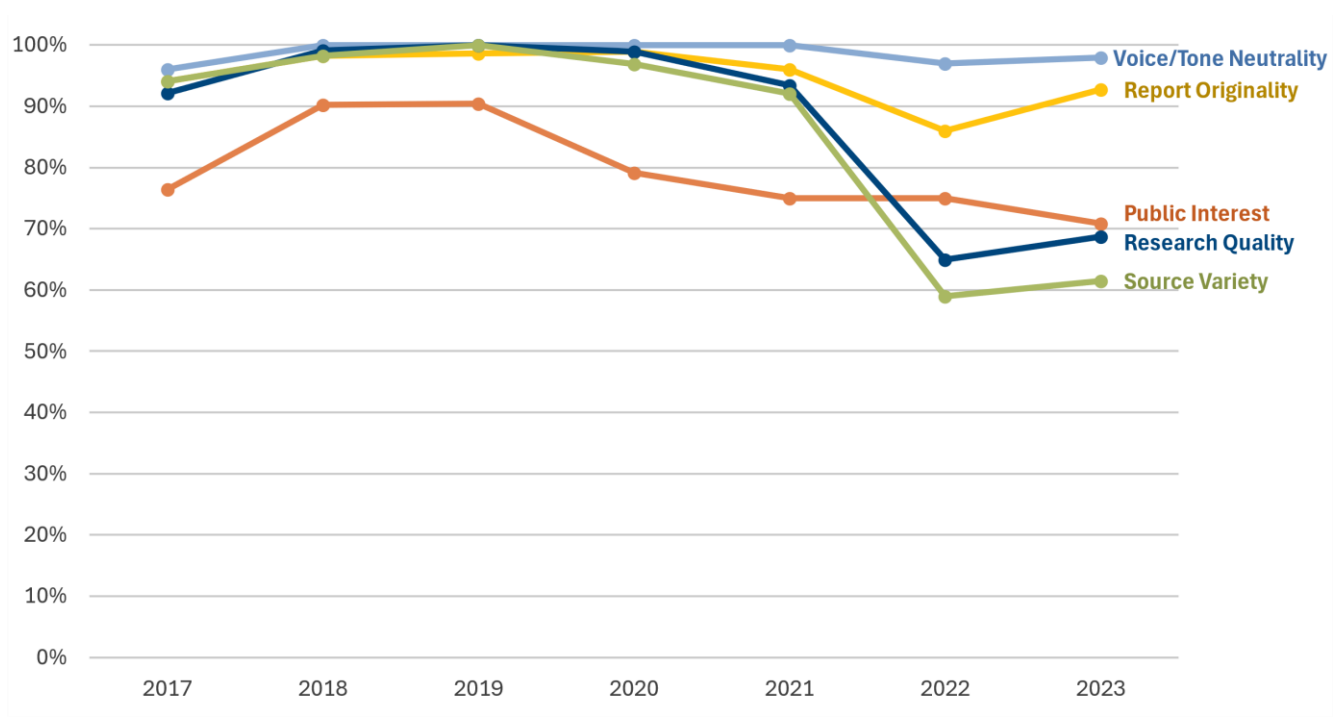
Exhibit 10. Proportion of grantee and non-grantee articles that at least moderately met quality standards across all domains (n = 721 articles)



Finding 6: Overall, grantee investigative articles tend to at least moderately meet standards in each individual domain, although this is less true of the Public Interest domain. Within each domain, however, there appears to be a general decline in the quality of grantees’ investigative articles over time. Differences in quality for specific domains have narrowed between grantee and non-grantee articles in recent years.

From 2017 to 2023, a high proportion of grantee-produced articles at least moderately met standards in each domain (Exhibit 11). Of all the domains, articles performed worst on Public Interest between 2017 and 2021. Performance began to decline in other domains between 2020 and 2022, with Research Quality and Source Variety experiencing the largest drops (though both slightly rebounded in 2023). Only Voice/Tone Neutrality consistently remained high across all years of analysis.

Exhibit 11. Proportion of grantee articles at least moderately meeting (score of 3, 4, or 5) the quality standard for each domain, 2017–2023 (n = 572 grantee articles)



While grantee and non-grantee article performance followed similar patterns for most domains over the years (Exhibit 12), from 2017 to 2020 grantee articles were consistently more likely to meet or exceed the quality standards for Research Quality and Source Variety. The performance of each group begins to converge beginning in 2021, which may be due to grantee work training journalists across the country, developing and disseminating research tools, and financially sponsoring investigative journalism. Performance on Public Interest, Report Originality, and Source Variety were more mixed, with grantee-produced articles more likely to meet or exceed standards in some years, and non-grantee produced articles doing so in others. Overall, the two groups appear to converge towards parity in recent years in most domains.

Exhibit 12. Proportion of grantee and non-grantee articles meeting (score of 4) or exceeding (score of 5) the quality standard by domain, 2017–2023 (n = 721 articles)



Conclusions

Conclusion 1: There continues to be a substantial amount of corruption-related reporting in Nigeria, and in 2022 and 2023, several On Nigeria grantees—including ICPC, SERAP, and Daily Trust—featured prominently in the media, as did key anticorruption actors like EFCC and INEC. Reporting on elections increased considerably in 2022 and 2023, relative to previous years.

In 2022 and 2023, corruption-related traditional and digital media continued to highlight exposing corrupt acts, and several On Nigeria grantees continue to appear in the media regularly, as do anticorruption actors like the ICPC, EFCC, and INEC.

2022 and 2023 also saw an increase in the number of stories focused on elections. The prominence of the elections is to be expected, given that these years involved the run-up to, outcome of, and controversy surrounding the 2023 presidential contest. INEC, unsurprisingly, given its role as the oversight body in charge of conducting elections, featured heavily in 2022 and 2023. ICPC and EFCC, along with INEC, were often mentioned in articles that discussed election integrity. SERAP, meanwhile, which has engaged in quite a bit of litigation and advocacy on corruption issues, appeared frequently in news articles related to grievance and accountability mechanisms in general, and 2023 election-related petitions in particular. As in 2021, the persistent prominence of these actors in the media continues to suggest that they are key players in the accountability ecosystem, and are well placed to drive attention toward and action against corruption in the future.

Conclusion 2: The proportion of investigative articles produced by non-grantees has grown considerably since 2017. The overall quality of investigative reports, however, appears to be declining, even as the quality gap between non-grantees and grantees narrows. Further exploration may be warranted to determine and address the drivers of these trends.

The overall number of investigative reports identified in the media monitoring sample remained somewhat consistent from 2017 to 2023. The proportion of these articles produced by non-grantees has risen over the same period, while the quality of all investigative articles appears to decline. This decline is seen most sharply in the Research Quality and Source Variety domains, both of which rely on several factors, including journalists' capacity, sources' willingness to speak, various agencies' responsiveness to Freedom of Information Act requests, and more. In contrast, the quality of Voice/Tone Neutrality remains quite high across articles published throughout the years. The Public Interest domain has consistently represented an area for growth. Stepping back, the data seems to suggest that non-grantees are catching up to grantees in terms of quality.

Further exploration of the drivers behind the quality of reports may be warranted. As described in *Learning Brief: Amplifying Investigative Reporting*, grantees conduct a variety of capacity-building activities for journalists throughout Nigeria, and face considerable challenges (including closing civic space) when engaging in investigative journalism. Further understanding these factors, including how grantees conduct skill-building activities, may contribute to a richer understanding of how to best strengthen the media landscape before On Nigeria closes later this year.

