

Investigative Reporting and Press Coverage of Corruption in
Nigeria (1999-2012)

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Being a thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies

University of East Anglia, Norwich

September 2017

Acknowledgment:

To my Examiners, Professor Katrin Voltmer and Professor John Street, for your diligence, kind consideration and support

To my Supervisors, Dr Marina Prentoulis, Dr Sanna Inthorn and Dr Li Zhang, for your patience, guidance and mentorship every step of the way throughout these long years

To my parents, Alhaji Ndagi Suleiman and Hajiya Fatima Mustapha, for first showing the path and walking me along

To my wife, Aishah Musa for being there all through and holding it up when my nerves fail

To my son, Suleiman Jnr for all those years I missed

To my brothers, Muhammad, Muhammad, Ibrahim, Abdullahi, and sister, Hadiza, for the continuing affection and support

To Professor Alan Finlayson, Dr Susan Doyle, Dr Maja Simonjak, Dr John Turnpenny, Dr Martin Scott, Dr Pierre Bocquillon, Dr Michael Fraser and Dr Elizabeth Cobbett, Dr Juliet Harkin, Dr Rhoda Beskeni, Dr Samuel T. Ende, Dr T. Wuam, Dr Victor Egwemi, Professor Ibrahim Bello-Kano, Professor Umaru Pate, Dr A. D. Alhassan, Dr Ibrahim Suleiman Lemu, and of course, Dr Abubakar Minjibir, and all my teachers, for all the kind support

To all my friends, Isah, Naziru, Abdulmutallib, Mustapha, Abubakar, Shuaibu Adamu, Ahmad, Aliyu Vulegbo, Garhe, Jamila, Yasmin, Dooshima, Motilola, Maryam Lemu, Zainab Usman, Genevieve Bossa, Aisha Nnamashe, Alhassan, Salisu and many others I cannot name, for all the friendship and togetherness

To all colleagues and doctoral comrades in the Faculty of Humanities PGR study room, Akin, Sam, Asmau, Nansata, Ali, Jareh, Yuxin, Susan Wang, James, Sara, Bushra, Sam, Danny, Mike and many more not mentioned here, for all the collegiality and support

To all my respondents, for all the time and trouble

And to the University of East Anglia for THAT studentship!

To the unity, security and prosperity of Nigeria, Africa and the world

To express my debt and gratitude to you all will require the length of another thesis. But thank you all and best regards!

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Abstract:

For African countries like Nigeria, democratic transition is conceived as not only in terms of advancing human rights and political freedoms, but also for improving political accountability, or quite simply, reducing corruption; and the role of the press is said to be central to both through watchdog and investigative journalism (Lynch and Crawford, 2011; Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011b). This research therefore asks: How and to what extent do Nigerian newspapers cover corruption and what specific role does investigative reporting play in that coverage?

For answer, I content analysed front page news coverage in a sample of 2746 newspapers from four national dailies over twelve years by selecting every 6th edition in each publication from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2012. This is supplemented with a total of 8 weeks of two newsroom observation in two of the dailies in Abuja and Lagos, and in-depth interviews with 24 respondents, including investigative reporters, political reporters, editors, two members of staff of anticorruption agencies, and one official of an NGO promoting investigative journalism in Nigeria.

I find three types of corruption stories in the newspapers. First, *corruption scandals* of real or alleged instances of corruption and in which persons and sums involved are clearly named in the stories. These constitute 45.72% of the total or slightly less than half. But corruption scandals tend to generate *follow-up* stories, or subsequent reports of the arrest, trial or conviction of officials involved in previously reported scandals. Finally, *corruption talk* which are stories of corruption but without involving any specific instances of corrupt act by any person. Corruption is the subject of the story but without the act itself, as the statements by two Nigerian presidents indicate above. Furthermore, I find

that corruption is extensively and prominently reported in the press, accounting for over 8% of total front page news coverage, or an average over two corruption stories every week throughout the 12-year period. Indeed, nearly 10% of newspapers in the sample carry *two or more* different stories of corruption on the *same* front page, further indicating a high extent of coverage. However, only a small fraction (4.76%) of this coverage issues from independent journalism by the four newspapers combined. Almost 90% of scandals, or stories of actual or alleged corruption is generated by official or state-level sources such as anti-corruption agencies, parliamentary investigations, commissions of inquiry and sometimes foreign media, through various practices of information subsidy like press releases and conferences. Equally significant, corruption stories subsidized for the press tends to involve higher a scale of corruption than those independently reported by the newspapers through investigative journalism.

However, whereas existing research conceives information subsidy as having the potential to compromise the fourth estate role of the press, I argue that this is not the case in the specific instance of corruption stories in Nigerian newspapers. Indeed, information subsidy supplied by corruption investigating-agencies may in fact be a necessary condition for more watchdog journalism investigated by newspapers. Watchdog role of the press with regards to exposing corruption is positively served, rather than harmed, by information subsidy resulting from horizontal accountability functions of state agencies. Furthermore, I argue that in the specific context of corruption stories in Nigerian newspapers, information subsidy itself should be understood, not only as a strategic agenda of sources for gaining coverage, but that it reflects a deeply entrenched ‘anti-corruption culture’ in Nigerian politics and society. That is, the general tendency for virtually all Nigerian governments to make ‘the fight

against corruption' the centre of policy or political action, and for citizens to demand that their governments fight corruption. With the onset of democracy over a long period never witnessed before in Nigeria however, this tendency finds free expression. This manifests, first, in the establishment of more anti-corruption agencies, investigative committees, and probe panels, across all levels of government, and then in their high-profile investigations and reports which then generates most of the news about corruption in the newspapers. I illustrate these arguments in chapters four through seven and examine the role of the press in these processes, that is, the press as strong watchdogs but weak investigators.

Chapter One: Introduction: Research context:

1.1 Introduction:

During his remarks at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2016, U.S Secretary of State, John Kerry said, among other things, that, “just this week, we saw reports that more than 50 people in Nigeria, including former government officials, stole \$9 billion from the treasury” (Kerry, 2016)¹. Kerry was referring specifically to the *Dasukigate* corruption scandal in which then immediate past National Security Adviser, retired Colonel Sambo Dasuki and other top officials of government were alleged to have siphoned off billions from the security budget. But similar cases of grand corruption by top level officials of government and corporate executives, typically involving hundreds of millions or billions of dollars have been regular features of news in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999. During this period, Nigeria has consistently ranked high among the most corrupt countries in the world, clinching the top place in 2000 in the Transparency International (TI) corruption perception index². Hardly a week goes by without some news of corruption being reported in the Nigerian press. At first glance, this gives the impression of an adversarial press much active in its watchdog role. Indeed, journalism practitioners and scholars alike have attributed such reporting of corruption to Nigerian media’s bravery and vigilance in promoting democratic development and good governance. For example, Ojo (2003: 832) notes that “since the advent of democracy in Nigeria

¹ John Kerry, Remarks at WEF, Davos, 22 January 2016 (www.cfr.org/economic-development/remarks-secretary-kerry-world-economic-forum/p37469

² Transparency International Report, 2000 (http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2000/0/). Since then, Nigeria’s position on TI’s Corruption Perception Index has changed significantly, generally lower, although TI’s CPI data and their sources have also changed considerably, including more countries than in 2000. Nigeria currently ranks 136 out of 176 countries on the TI’s 2016 Index. However, it is possible that Nigerians generally believe that corruption is actually in the rise in the country.

in 1999, the media have been alert to their function of watchdog". Yet, corruption of the sort involving millions and even billions of dollars, or grand corruption as it is often called, is a highly clandestine affair. First, it normally involves a small number of officials occupying high positions entrusted to make decisions on behalf of the public. Second, majority of citizens do not have any direct experience of corruption of this scale, unlike petty or everyday corruption which citizens can experience directly in their everyday engagement with the state because it generally involves small sums of money and lower level bureaucrats, (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016: 11; Moody-Stuart, 1997: 2). Hoffmann and Patel (2017: 9) report that Nigerians are quick to recall paying a bribe to traffic police to escape a fine, and the ethnographer, Smith (2001: 352-353) recounts the case of a parent bribing an official of the education ministry to get a child into school. Both examples above illustrate petty or lower scale corruption in Nigeria. But for cases of corruption involving higher level officials and much larger sums of money such as the case of *Dasukigate* cited by Kerry above, citizens typically learn about them in the news, rather than through personal experience. It is an important question, then, to ask how news of a \$9bn official theft breaks to the press in Nigeria and on such regular basis. How and to what extent is corruption reported in the Nigerian press? What part, if any, does independent investigative journalism play in press coverage of corruption in Nigeria? How do the specific contexts of politics, economy and society in Nigeria influence investigative reporting of corruption? This last question is especially significant because specific national contexts influence or shape media systems and journalistic behaviour around the world (Hanitzsch, 2011; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The above then are some of the questions with which this research engages. It seeks to understand and evaluate investigative

reporting of corruption in Nigeria in the context of the past decade and half of democratization.

(a) Period of study:

The period under consideration (1999-2012) is itself remarkable for Nigeria in many respects. First, it represents the longest stretch of democracy in its political history, during which Nigeria has witnessed, for the first time, a peaceful transfer of power from one democratic government to another in 2007 and to an opposition party in 2015 respectively. Considering that previous attempts at democratic transfer of power, even within the same party, had resulted in military intervention, these successful elections represent a significant milestone for Nigerian political development (Egbefo, 2015; Egwemi, 2010). It also points towards some prospects for democratic consolidation, which Schedler (1998: 91) describes as the possibility of extending the life expectancy of a new democracy beyond the short term. Secondly, the Nigerian economy has seen considerable expansion during the same period, due mainly to steady increases in oil prices (from 2002 to 2014) and expansion of new sectors such as telecoms and the entertainment industry (World Bank Group, 2014: 3-4)³, becoming, by 2012, the largest economy on the continent with a GDP well above \$500 billion dollars.

Indeed, the economics and politics of oil in Nigeria is central to discussions about its political and economic developments, and particularly significant for any discussions of corruption in the country. For example, according to Itumo (2016: 21), since the discovery of oil in 1956, Nigeria's economy has shifted considerably from one based on agricultural and manufacturing exports to a

³ Since 2015 however, the economy has been on a downward trend, resulting in its first recession in two decades in 2016 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Africa Development Bank, 2015).

‘mono-cultural’ economy based almost entirely on oil exports. In 1958, Itumo notes further, oil in Nigeria makes up just about 1% of export earnings, but by 1984, it has risen to 97%, and has hovered in the region of 90% of export earnings ever since (*ibid*). Furthermore, as the thirteenth largest exporter of crude oil in the world with total production of more than 2 million barrels per day, its oil exports account for over 80% of government revenues and budgetary expenditures (Itumo, 2016: 24; Watts, 2004: 50). Similarly, Akanbi (2015: 1579) contends that the Nigerian economy remains over-reliant on oil revenues with attendant effects on shocks to the economy, each time there is a slump in oil prices in the global oil market, as most recently in 2014-2015.

In addition, the outsized role that oil plays in Nigerian economy also influences its politics, and as we shall see presently, the extent and scale of corruption too, since, in the main, oil in Nigeria is effectively under the control of the federal government. For example, Onapajo et al (2015: 4) observe that abundant oil wealth in Nigeria serves to intensify elite competition because access to state power also simultaneously guarantees access to oil wealth, in practice if not in theory. For Onapajo et al therefore, oil wealth, or at least access to it through state power, explains incessant coups during military regimes and win-at-all-cost electoral practices during democratic governments in the country. Furthermore, Ikelegbe (2005: 208) notes that oil wealth and its politics is the underlying factor behind much of the regional and local political conflicts in the Niger Delta region⁴.

More significantly however, several observers, taking a cue from the literature on ‘resource curse’ see a connection between Nigeria’s political economy of oil

⁴ The Niger Delta region, comprising about nine of Nigeria’s 36 states, is the region of the country where most of the onshore oil is located, although over 90% of the oil onshore oil is drilled from three core states of Akwa-Ibom, Delta and Rivers states. A lot of exploration and drilling also goes on offshore.

and the extent and scale of corruption in the country (Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian, 2013; Vincente, 2010; Shaxson, 2007; Ades and Di Tella, 1999). While records of official malfeasance in Nigeria dates to the early 1920s, the rise of a mono-cultural oil economy since the 1970s appears to have intensified it (Pearce, 2016). As Osoba (1996: 371) put it, “corruption in Nigeria is aided and enhanced by oil revenues”. Similarly, Ogbeidi (2012: 8-10) has noted that a series of oil booms, or ‘windfalls’ as they are known in local parlance, from the 1970s to date tend to correlate not only with frequent changes in government by ballot or coups, but also with accusations of corruption in the press and popular culture alike, since such accusations of corruption, Pearce (2016: 118) notes, are ‘performative’, and thereby doing political work. Thus, if accusations of corruption in Nigeria are a form of performative politics, it is worth asking what role the press, and investigative journalism particularly, plays in that process.

As we shall see, developments in the country’s political and economic sectors since 1999 have in turn occasioned similar developments in the media, far more rapidly and extensively than at any time previously. The advent of democracy intensified deregulation of the media and improved general operating atmosphere, leading up to the adoption of Freedom of Information Act in 2011. This, in turn, has resulted in the proliferation of new media outlets across all platforms: print, broadcast and increasingly online. Also, new players in the economy have expanded the advertising and media markets (Tsegyu, 2015; Ciboh, 2007). One implication of these changes is a massive increase in coverage of politics, including coverage of corruption in both mainstream and social media. Another implication is audience fragmentation, as young voters with little or no experience of life under the military seek alternative channels of expression made possible by a burgeoning mobile phone market and growth of

social media, both of which have been relevant to politics and political communication in the country. Third, professional journalism training has expanded too, perhaps in response to these and other changes in society. Salawu (2009: 84) contends that since the turn of the century, there has been a “boom” for journalism and mass communication programmes in Nigerian higher education as both old and new universities establish such programmes. And yet, rising population, poverty and inequality, corruption, communal conflicts, militancy and terrorism during this period have together threatened to undermine Nigeria’s very political, economic and social foundations (Egbefo, 2015; Ani, 2012). And more significantly for our purposes here, the media has been the most sites of these conflicts and issues in Nigeria (Hackett, 2003; Sampson, 2012). For corruption particularly, Global Financial Integrity (2017) estimates that from 2005 to 2014 alone Nigeria lost some \$182 billion through illicit financial flows out of the country (in Hoffmann and Patel, 2017: IV).

The connection between investigative journalism and press coverage of corruption on the one hand, and developments in Nigerian politics and economy on the other, bears restating. Over its long march to freedom, the press has become established as an organ of public accountability in a democratic society: to check the abuses and excesses of those in power and to keep the state in its proper constitutional boundaries (McQuail, 2005: 166-170). For societies in democratic transition like Nigeria, these political watchdog functions of the press can be particularly important, given that authoritarian tendencies of the immediate past, including corruption and impunity, may yet remain deeply entrenched in the new democracy (Jebril, Loveless and Stetka, 2015: 90-91; Voltmer, 2013: 103; McConnel and Becker, 2002: 2). The implication then is that the media helps to ‘deepen’ or ‘consolidate’ democratic development in a variety of ways, but particularly through its watchdog function. At least, as we

shall see, it is this function that Nigerian media and journalists conceive for themselves. My argument here is that an empirical evaluation of investigative reporting of corruption and press coverage of corruption more generally⁵ over the same period would be a useful way of making valid statements about media and democratization in Nigeria. Therefore, in this chapter, I first examine democratization and corruption in the context of Africa and Nigeria, and the ways in which both connect to investigative journalism and the press in order to define the starting point of the research.

1.2 Democratization in Africa:

A broad understanding of democratization sees it as any incremental change towards more democracy, “no matter how small” (Bogaards, 2010: 476), implying that democratic governance can always be perfected, for both new and established democracies alike. But a narrower definition focuses on democratic transition and is more common in comparative literature. Whitehead (2002: 27) defines democratization in this sense as “a complex, long term, dynamic, and open-ended process ... of progress towards a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics”, (in Jebril, Loveless and Stetka, 2015: 85). This implies a starting point characterised by an authoritarian political system such as military rule or single party dictatorships that dominated African political systems before the 1990s, and a movement away from that point to more rule-based and popular participation of citizens in the governance system. This process is usually marked by a founding multi-party election, such as

⁵ The distinction between investigative reporting of corruption and otherwise general press coverage of corruption is important to this research. The assumption is that newspapers can report news of corruption which they have not independently investigated (general coverage or reporting of corruption), for example news of corruption investigated by the police or anticorruption agency; but they can also report news of corruption which they have independently investigated (investigative reporting of corruption). The key difference is independent journalistic initiative and independent sources in the case of investigative reporting of corruption. The coding procedure is based on this distinction.

Nigeria's 1999 transition election, which symbolize a point of departure from the previous authoritarian system (Monck, 2001; in Bogaards, 2010: 476).

Research on democratization has turned full circle since Huntington's idea of a 'Third Wave' of democratization (Haggard and Kauffmann, 2016: 126). Huntington (1991) argued that a 'third wave' had arrived on the historical horizon of democratization, following two previous waves and reversals stretching over a century and half. He attributed this to a range of factors including "performance legitimacy" crisis of authoritarian governments, post-war economic boom in the 1960s, the collapse of Soviet Union and the decline of the Cold War, among others. These factors, Huntington argues, sparked off the collapse of authoritarian regimes first in Spain and Portugal in the mid-1970s, and then in Latin America and former Soviet republics of Eastern Europe, consequently 'snowballing' to other regions like Africa (*ibid*: 13-14). This idea in turn sparked off a flurry of research on the causes of regime change and transition in many formerly autocratic systems. In her review of extant research two decades after liberalization in Southern Europe, Geddes (1999) identifies several such causes, including poor economic performance or outright economic crises, factionalism and splits within outgoing regimes, benevolent elite-initiated transitions, the influence of external events and institutions such as IMF and the World Bank, etc. Carothers (2002) notes, however, that observers of the third wave had assumed democratization follows a straight path from political liberalization to consolidation. Such a straightforward conception of democratization, Carothers notes further, overlooks structural impediments like viability of the state, political tensions arising from ethnic diversity, continuing legacies of an authoritarian past and entrenched socio-cultural traditions. But as the contradictions of these factors became apparent in the new democracies, enthusiasm in scholarly and policy circles waned. The findings of many studies

reveal a common theme: despite the elections, many third wave democracies came to be regarded as falling short of even minimalist conditions for effective democracy. Consequently, the research agenda turned to the search for explaining the ‘democratic deficits’ and a barrage of new terms and concepts emerged for describing and measuring the ‘quality’ of democracy in the third wave countries: defective democracies, illiberal democracies, competitive authoritarianism, electoral democracies or semi-democracies, hybrid regimes, and so on (Haggard and Kauffman, 2016; Bogaards, 2009; Croissant, 2004; Croissant and Merkel, 2004; Levitsky and Way, 2002; Schedler, 1998; Collier and Levitsky, 1997). What then are the implications of the foregoing for democratization in Africa, and Nigeria specifically?

(a) African Experience:

African countries make up a sizable number of third wave democracies. Some 44 out of 48 Sub-Saharan countries held multiparty transition elections between 1990 and 2003 (Lynch and Crawford, 2011: 279; Hassim, 2006: 931). Perhaps for this reason, Africa has featured considerably in many scholarly investigations of political change in the developing world. This work was first to explain the emergence, and then to assess performance so far. Hassim (2006: 931) points out that the recent push towards more democracy in Africa results from “dual pressures on corrupt, heavily indebted, and authoritarian states” by international lending agencies and local grassroots movements. She argues, however, that this wave of democratization must be understood within the context of a longstanding trend of resistance against foreign or local authoritarianisms on the continent. By this view then, current democratization in Africa is but a stage in a long march towards freedom and development stretching back decades. Brown and Kaiser (2007: 1140-1142) hold that

structural factors such as political culture and an underdeveloped economy have long been viewed as either incentives or impediments to democracy in Africa by modernization and dependency theoretical schools. But more recent explanations, they note, have emphasized civil society mobilization. Morency-Laflamme (2015) finds elite factionalism and civil society mobilizations as the drivers of democratization in South Africa, Benin and Togo. Vanhanen (2004) follows his earlier work on democratization in other regions to argue that the African experience is also explained by the struggle for power and limited resources among elites and masses alike. But perhaps the most influential theory of democratization in Africa is advanced by Michael Bratton and colleagues (Bratton, 1994; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994; 1997).

In this formulation, civil society organizations in Africa evolved in response to urbanization and modernization of the economy during the early colonial period. Some of these civil society organizations were ethnic welfare associations in towns and cities, but also church organizations, professional associations like those of journalists and lawyers, trade unions of railway or mine workers, women's groups and so on. They differed in prominence in respective countries, but everywhere civil society organizations provided alternative fora for expression and pursuit of common goals, and occupied the informal economy, which in Africa can be as large as the formal economy, if not more so. Soon enough, Bratton (1994: 5-6) argues, they became involved with nationalist political parties and politicians in the anti-colonial movement. After independence however, most became politically dormant but again morphed into 'alternative institutional framework to officialdom' when military and single-party authoritarian regimes became the norm shortly after. For Bratton (1994: 6) then

the fact that African citizens autonomously undertook a wide range of organized economic activity had profound political implications. As trade shifted to illegal or informal networks, taxes became difficult to collect and public revenues diminished, especially in valuable foreign exchange, thereby exacerbating the fiscal crisis of the state. Financially deprived governments had little option but to loosen restrictions on autonomous networks and organizations by permitting them to perform some of the functions previously monopolized by government. By the end of the 1980s, independent associations and alternative economic networks together provided a recruiting ground for a popular upsurge against post-colonial autocracy

By mobilizing marginalized groups through discourses of human rights and anti-corruption and strategies such as the national conference, civil society organizations successfully dislodged authoritarian governments from power, with the active assistance of the donor community (ibid: 1994: 10). For a theory of democratization, the Huntingtonian origins of this idea are apparent, even if it substitutes the role of the Catholic Church in Southern Europe and Latin America in the original for civil society in Africa. But it has two implications for this research. First, for its persuasiveness, it depends on a 'neopatrimonial' model of the African state in which political, economic and even social organization are based on a patronage system by the bigman at all levels of governance (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994; 1997). It thus explicitly links democratization to corruption, both major themes of the present research. Secondly, it puts civil society, and by implication the press, at the core of both democratization and anti-corruption. As Bratton (1994: 6) claims, "African journalists have been a driving force within civil society", through their political reporting and commentary. Indeed, it is within this 'civil society' model of democratization that several scholars locate both media and journalists, and by implication watchdog journalism in much of African political communication

research, as I discuss subsequently (Berger, 2002; Olukotun, 2002; Tettey, 2001). But to what extent has democracy fared in Africa after over two decades?

There is some good news. Carbone et al (2016) compare 30 years of GDP data and find that democratic governance has improved economic growth for 43 African countries. Also, Lindberg and Clark (2008) provide evidence to support a declining possibility of military intervention in African politics. Coups are 7.5 times less likely to occur and 18 times less likely to result in regime collapse in the more democratic countries, because of election turn-overs and relative expansion in civil liberties. Thus, over time, repeated elections have a self-reinforcing effect on democratization in the region (Lindberg, 2006). Most findings are less upbeat however. Wahman (2014) finds that electoral turnovers and opposition victories enhance democratization in only a few countries like Ghana, but not in others like Kenya and Senegal, due to weak party institutionalization. Gyimah-Boadi (2015) has observed that initial enthusiasm for democracy on the continent has been followed by a “waning commitment” to it, due to several factors, above all, lack of constitutionalism among the players, in government and opposition alike. Similarly, Adebanwi and Obadare (2011a) contend that deliberate rigging of elections, or their outright annulment, and instigation of post-election violence have combined to “abrogate the electorate”. Lynch and Crawford (2011) offer evidence that point to both prospects for hope and conditions for concern, such as endemic corruption and rising inequality, even amidst rising economic growth over a decade.

(b) The Nigerian Experience:

The specific case of democratization in Nigeria reflects the general trend for Africa described above. Indeed, several of the studies cited for Africa include

Nigeria in the analysis or draws examples from its experience. Still, some studies show that Nigerian elections have been fraught with irregularities, manipulation, vote-rigging, vote-buying and suppression of popular will by several means, sometimes in concert with security agencies, the electoral management body itself or its field agents or by the outsized influence of “election merchants and political barons” (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006; Adejumobi, 2000). Other researchers look at lack of ideology and poor institutionalization in all the parties (Dode, 2010; Omotola, 2010). Yet, others investigate the connection between democratization and ethno-religious conflicts that have been a major characteristic of the transition period since 1999 (Ukiwo, 2003), some of which involves active participation by some civil society organizations (Ikelegbe, 2001). Consequently, Fasakin (2015) reasons that Nigeria at present is de-democratizing since democracy has not delivered sufficient dividends to citizens in economic terms or expansion of political rights, and thus threatens the security of it the state. For all the foregoing, however, a series of surveys by Bratton and Lewis (2008) still find that although democratization has not delivered socio-economic goods, preference for democracy among Nigerians remains high, since over time, the process has increased ‘political goods’ such as civil liberties and political rights. Moreover, Alebiosu (2016: 69) observes that the introduction of ‘smart card readers’ which track voter details in the 2015 general elections has greatly improved the integrity of the electoral process and recommends its further use in future elections. Similarly, Lewis and Kew (2015: 94) contend that the defeat of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP)⁶ at the polls during the 2015 general elections and its peaceful concession to the opposition are indications of a maturing

⁶ The PDP had controlled both houses of the federal parliament, the presidency, and majority of the states since the 1999 election, but was overwhelmingly defeated in the 2015 general elections by the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC).

democracy in the country. Finally, some studies consider corruption and bad governance as the ‘bane of democracy’ in Nigeria (Ogundiya, 2010), because corruption erodes popular legitimacy (Fagbadebo, 2007: 28), particularly at the grassroots and local government level (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010). Indeed, Adebanwi and Obadare (2011b) claim that corruption “arguably” led to collapse of previous attempts at democratization in Nigeria, but nonetheless expect that “the ebullience of civil society, the freedom of the press, and the accountability of political institutions, among others, will sound the death knell of corruption” (ibid: 187). It should be noted however, that, few of these studies present scarcely any systematic data to support the claims they make about democratization in Nigeria. Nevertheless, they highlight some conceptual connections between democratization, corruption and the press in Nigeria.

1.3 What is Corruption? Defining and measuring corruption:

Perceptions of corruption are ubiquitous everywhere. A poll of 24,000 people in 26 countries sponsored by the BBC ranks corruption as the frequently most discussed issue among the public globally (Holmes, 2015: xiii). The World Bank estimates that about \$1 trillion is paid in bribes annually around the world (Goel and Nelson, 2010: 433). And yet, few concepts are more difficult to define than corruption. However, the most widely cited definition is that by Transparency International: corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain (Holmes, 2015: 2). But this definition is also the most contested. There are several grounds for the contestation. First, the definition assumes that corruption occurs only in contexts involving a ‘public official’ or ‘office’, and thus rules out illicit gain or abuse of power and trust in the private sector. But as Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016: 7) point out, corruption occurs in the private sector as well, even without any public officials involved, and its impacts can be just as damaging.

Furthermore, Harris (2003) has observed that the question is not one of misuse of office for private gain, but of its extent, since “misuse of power for private gain is normal political behaviour and corruption comes in only at some qualitative or quantitative threshold deemed unacceptable” (ibid: 5-6). For Harris, personal gain of some kind is a normal consequence of holding public office which most politicians exploit in the form of patronage, political spoils, revolving doors into directorships of companies after public office, consultancies, paid speeches, book contracts and so on. Thus, he offers a different definition of corruption as “an illegitimate extension of normal political activity” (ibid: 29). Scholars also disagree about what constitutes “abuse” of office, since societies differ in culture and normative values (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016: 239; Gregory, et al, 2012: 7). There is disagreement also over the boundaries between ‘public’ and ‘private’ gain, particularly in societies where ethnicity and identity politics more generally are high (Orjuela, 2014: 759) or in societies with more ‘collectivist’, rather than ‘individualistic’ cultures (Li, Triandis and Yu, 2006). Sometimes, corruption is simply perceptual. Graycar and Monaghan (2015: 592) report that a national poll in Australia found that 43% of respondents believed corruption was increasing, even though only 1% reported that they had paid a bribe in the previous year.

In other words, corruption is difficult to define because it varies significantly in form and content across countries and is sometimes intricately linked to legitimate transactions. However, I follow Michael Johnston’s definition that corruption involves “the abuse of trust for private benefit, which often, but by no means always, comes in the form of money” (Johnston, 2005: 11). That is, corruption involving financial misconduct by public officials, institutions or top executives in the private sector. This definition is useful here as it explicitly conceives money as the foremost value gained through corrupt transactions,

which fits with the way news of corruption is generally expressed in Nigerian newspapers, and hence my adoption of it.

(a) Measuring Corruption:

There are several measures of corruption most of which are contested because, as a clandestine activity, corruption is difficult to measure both qualitatively and quantitatively. For example, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) does not measure corruption itself, but its perception by citizens, businesses and other observers through aggregations of surveys. The World Bank's Control of Corruption Index (CCI) is like Transparency International's CPI but includes data on anti-corruption institutions such as electoral integrity and freedom of the press (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016: 19). Both CPI and CCI publish cross-national data on corruption annually and are "extremely highly correlated" to each other (Treisman, 2007: 213). Yet, Johnston (2005: 20) observes that because the CPI is based on a single numeric value, the index reduces the complexity of corruption to quantitative matters of degree, and by implication obscures qualitative differences both within and across countries. For Orjuela (2014: 756), the CPI simultaneously covers too much and too little: it subsumes many different practices under the same label, but still separate them from the social, political and cultural contexts within which they occur. Finally, some studies observe that perceptual measures of corruption fail to capture the more complex ways in which corruption occurs in more advanced economies and democracies, such as influence peddling, campaign finance, lobbying for self-interested legislation or de-legislation, breach of trust and conflict of interest, distortion of level-playing field or gaming the system, or the role of multinational corporations and banks in corruption in developing countries (Andersson, 2017; Cockcroft and Wegener, 2017; Stapenhurst et al,

2017; Graycar, 2016; Graycar and Monaghan, 2015; Johnston, 2014; Harris, 2003; Moody-Stuart, 1997).

(b) Corruption in Nigeria:

African countries occupy the bottom rungs of most cross-national corruption indices (Collier, 2000: 192). But since millions of Africans are as honest as people everywhere (ibid: 201), this has posed the difficult problem of locating the causes of corruption in Africa. It is estimated that Africa has lost nearly \$1 trillion to illicit financial flows and continues to lose \$50 billion a year in such illicit outflows, or several times more than donor inflows (Schlenther, 2016: 1076). For Nigeria, Hoffmann and Patel (2017: iv) estimate that over \$400 billion has been lost to corruption between 1960 and 1999 and that in 2014 alone, Nigeria lost some \$12 billion or 9% of total trade volume to illicit outflows. Indeed, research evidence shows that corruption harms developing economies, as determined by various indicators such as lower economic growth, lower human capital development in education and health, foreign direct investment, increase in poverty and inequality, etc (Triesman, 2007: 221; Lambsdorff, 2005: 4-11). Furthermore, Holmes (2015: 19-23) encourages lower levels of trust and public morality, and greater attachment to kinship, which in diverse countries like Nigeria potentially intensifies ethnic conflict. But what causes corruption? Some researchers point to the abundance of natural resources which creates opportunities for rent-seeking (Gregory et al, 2012: 8) or unearned income (Watts, 2004: 52-54), such as oil in Nigeria. The economist, Paul Collier (2000: 194) suggests that Africa became corrupt because of a “massive rise in the opportunities for corruption” created by excessive involvement of the state in the economy and weak monitoring. Other factors such as religion, legal system and colonialism are also said to correlate with corruption (Triesman, 2007).

However, Bratton and Van de Walle (1994) trace corruption to the ‘neopatrimonial’ state in Africa. In this model, political authority is personalised by the chief executive through an informal system of patronage and “relations of loyalty and dependency”, superimposed on a formal political and bureaucratic system. Neither the law nor political ideology matters that much although they exist formally, and public office blurs into private property for acquiring personal wealth and status for the holder. The key to this neopatrimonial system, they argue, is “the award by public officials of personal favours, both within the state (notably public-sector jobs) and in society (for instance, licenses, contracts and projects” (ibid: 458). For Bratton and Van de Walle, then, this theory explains both corruption and democratization in African countries, and of their privileging civil society as the prime instigator of democracy. Put simply, a neopatrimonial state does not permit elite factionalism; therefore, regime change is possible only through grassroots civil society mobilization against the state by appealing to the language of human rights and accountability, a process in which journalists and the press play a leading part (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997). There is a lot to say for this idea about corruption in Nigeria. For example, Adebanwi and Obadare (2011b), find it appealing for their analysis of corruption in Nigeria. However, Bratton and Van de Walle still ignore two facts. First, as several researchers have pointed out, many African civil society organizations are in fact lackeys of the state or of certain sections of it, rather than autonomous agents of democracy (Obadare, 2005); conflict-ridden and often as despotic and corrupt as the state, especially with aid dollars (Berger, 2002; Fatton, 1995). Moreover, civil society organizations in Africa are sometimes motivated by particularistic ethnic or religious interests, rather than broadly national or universal goals of democracy (Agbaje, 1993). Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, vertical accountability

by civil society against the state as assumed here might be hard to discern empirically, as I show in this research. For Nigeria and possibly for much of Africa, the state is still the most active agent of anti-corruption, far more than any organs of civil society such as the press. It is useful, at this point then, to examine press and political development in Nigeria.

1.4 Press, politics and political development in Nigeria:

Carl LeVan (2015: 375) states that “by several standard measures, Nigeria is an incredibly diverse country. It is home to 5% of all known languages, it is the largest country with roughly the same number of Christians and Muslims, and several data sets counting ethnic groups consider it among the most heterogeneous nations in the world”⁷. In constitution and structure, the Nigerian political system is unique in Africa, closer to that of the United States than it does to any other country on continent (Haruna, 2016; Jega, 2016). Under the current arrangement of the 1999 Constitution, the latest, and so far, the most enduring of Nigeria’s many short-lived constitutions, it is a federation of 36 states, 774 local government councils, and one federal capital territory in Abuja, administered directly by the federal government (Okpanachi and Garba, 2010: 3). The federal government comprises three independent arms: a presidential executive, a bicameral legislature and a hierarchy of federal courts, at the top of which is the Nigerian Supreme Court. This basic structure is replicated across the 36 states with slight variations, such as a unicameral legislature for the states (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). It has taken six decades of constitutional negotiation and innovation to arrive at the current structure however. At independence in 1960, the federal system comprised three ‘Regions’: Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria respectively.

⁷ In my view, such descriptions of Nigeria are influenced by the self-reinforcing ethno-religious politics dominant in the country, otherwise, Nigeria is not diverse as such, unlike say South Africa.

By 1967, the country had been subdivided into 12 ‘States’ by the first set of military governments, a process that continued periodically until reaching the present number of 36 states in 1996. Suberu (2010: 460-461) notes that the Nigerian federalism project has undergone six phases, from the late colonial period (1954-1960), through two stretches of several military governments which supervised three failed democratic transitions (1966-1979; 1983-1999), and finally, to the ongoing Fourth Republic (1999 to date). For him, therefore, the federal system today “represents a reasonably viable and successful mechanism for managing inter-group conflict and preventing ethno-political disintegration” (Suberu, 2010: 460). But Suberu’s is one of very few positive views of Nigeria’s political development. Other observers see a rather bleak future for Nigerian federalism and understand it as a major cause of these very conflicts (Kendhammer, 2014; Okpanachi and Garba, 2010; Adamolekun, 2005; Anugwom, 2000). But what is the place of the press in the structure described above?

(a) Media development in Nigeria:

Nigeria has the most complex and diverse media ecology in Africa (Olukotun, 2004: 74). In addition to a plethora of locally owned broadcast, print and online media, there are others like the BBC, VOA, Radio France etc, which though foreign owned, are mostly staffed by Nigerian journalists and report mostly Nigerian issues, and participate fully within Nigeria’s media culture. Broadcast media in the country number about 350 radio and television stations, mostly owned and controlled by various governments. Since deregulation of the sector in 1992 and democratization in 1999 however, there has been a growing private participation in the sector, with well over 100 private broadcasters. These are mostly FM radio stations with limited reach and concentrated mainly in the big cities and towns (EU, 2015: 22). While Nigerian newspapers and magazines are

generally recognised as the most vibrant on the continent mainly for their political reporting (Rønning, 2009: 165; Olukotun, 2000a: 33; Kasoma, 1995: 544; Agbaje, 1993: 458), it is not clear how many publications there are in the country. Recent estimates range from 100 to 400 dailies, weeklies and monthlies (EU 2015: 22; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2015: 143; Oxford Business Group, 2013: 278). Most of these are owned by proprietors who were themselves former journalists and editors, although an increasing number are owned by politicians or businessmen with alliances in politics (Musa and Domatob, 2007: 322). State governments and the federal government also own and operate a handful of newspapers, most of them dormant or sporadic and hardly read by anyone. In other words, the media system is characterised by a dichotomy of ownership: government ownership dominates the broadcast sector, while private ownership is dominant in the print sector. Finally, while broadband penetration remains poor at less than 10% (Fielding-Smith, 2014), internet access is available through mobile phones which nine in ten Nigerians now have (PEW Centre, 2015). Indeed, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and a few others account for the largest share of the ‘mobile revolution’ said to be transforming Africa’s democratic, economic, financial, as well as socio-cultural landscapes (Mutiga and Flood, 2016; Wallis, 2016; PEW Centre, 2015). Still, broadcasting and the press remain the dominant forms of Nigerian media system and account for much of the political news in the country.

Yet, broadcasting and the press have had very different histories in Nigeria. For one, while broadcasting was a direct offshoot of the state, the press was not. Indeed, broadcasting development has tended to mimic political development directly. It emerged through the BBC’s Empire Service ‘repeater’ mechanism then known as radio rediffusion service (RDS) in Lagos in the 1930s (Ihechu and Okugo, 2013: 13; Udomisor, 2013: 2; Opubor, Akingbolu and Ojebode, 2010: 62)

which functioned primarily for keeping “expatriates and colonial officials abreast of events in Britain” (Ojebode and Akingbolu, 2009: 205). Exigencies of the Second World War and its aftermath necessitated expansion to regional demographic hubs like Ibadan, Enugu and Kano (Tafida, 2015: 53) in a BBC-styled Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in 1957. Subsequent developments in the sector transformed the NBC into Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) in 1976, both of which, though owned by the federal government, remain the dominant players in the broadcast sector to date (Opubor, Akingbolu and Ojebode, 2010: 64-65). Moreover, just as radio broadcasting grew out of colonial politics, television, too, was a consequence of then emerging post-independence politics. The NBC Act of 1957 also granted powers to the regions to establish, control and legislate on broadcasting stations in their own respective domains, which they all did by 1962. Similar developments occurred in the print sector as each regional government sought to establish and run its own newspapers, often controlled by the dominant party in the respective regions, in the name of developing their own states or for the need to have their own voice heard within the political space (Ojebode and Akingbolu, 2009: 206; Umeh, 1989: 56-58). In this sense, therefore, political competition between the regions was a major factor in media development in the country. Since then, the impacts of broadcasting deregulation in 1992, the return to democracy in 1999 and rapid global developments in new media technologies have resulted in the proliferation of broadcast, print and online media in the country (Kur and Nyekwere, 2015: 135-140; Tafida, 2015: 58; Ciboh, 2007: 25). But unlike broadcasting which was a deliberate policy of the state, and therefore heavily regulated by it, the newspaper press predated the Nigerian state itself by well over half a century. Initially inspired by missionary zeal for proselytization and literacy in the late

1850s, the press had become established as educational, political, and commercial organ of an emerging local elite long before the colonial state itself was consolidated in 1914. By 1910, Lagos alone had 12 daily, weekly and monthly newspapers, all of them owned by Nigerians, a development that had no comparison anywhere else in Africa (Omu, 1978). Since then, the print press in Nigeria has remained predominantly private and independent of government control (Hall, 2009: 249; Shaw, 2009: 493; Agbaje, 1993: 458).

(b) Media and political development in Nigeria:

As the above shows, the media has been at the heart of the major themes that dominate scholarly discussions of political development in Nigeria. The first of these themes is the ‘national question’ which refers to the challenge of managing pluralism and diversity at various levels of identity: ethnic, religious, regional and so on that have impacted significantly on political and institutional development in the country since its founding in 1914 to date (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005; Gana, 2003; Ukiwo, 2003; Anugwom, 2000). Debates about the ‘national question’, is a central theme in the scholarly literature on politics and political development in Nigeria, and by extension, in Nigerian political communication research. Some studies argue that this ‘national question’ mitigates against the development of a meaningful national identity and fosters discriminatory citizenship practices in politics, economy and society, regardless of the ‘federal character principle’, itself a constitutional innovation based on a quota system aimed at redressing regional and ethnic disparities in federal jobs (Fourchard, 2015; Kendhammer, 2014; Majekodunmi, 2013; Kraxberger, 2005; Anugwom, 2000). Others are more concerned with how questions of ethnic, religious and regional diversity have shaped political institutions and practices, particularly the development of political parties, electoral politics and voting patterns of Nigerians, and the ownership and political behaviour of the media

(Kuenzi and Lambright, 2015; Kendhammer, 2010; Yusha'u, 2010; Olukotun, 2004; Omenuga, 2004; Osaghae, 2003; Agbaje, 1993). This last point is especially significant for our purposes here. For example, Umeh (1989: 57) has noted that the rush by the regional governments to establish and run expensive broadcasting ventures shortly after independence merely served "partisan political purposes for their governments". This was manifested in the first post-independence general elections in 1965 during which opposing radio and television stations across the three regions presented very different and conflicting results of the same elections to their audiences; as they did for census results only two years earlier (Galadima and Enighe, 2001: 65). In other words, partisan competition between regions or states also influenced media output, as national and global political events and issues were presented and interpreted from regional, often mutually exclusive perspectives (*ibid*).

But if broadcasting has been much influenced by the politics of ethno-regional competition in its ownership patterns and political economy, so too has the press; perhaps even more so. Agbaje (1993: 459) has observed that the Nigerian press "has always been one with a cause- committed, agitational and often political" right from its inception. During the anti-colonial struggle for example, some of the 'nationalists' like Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo were themselves publishers who used newspapers like the *West African Pilot*, *Tribune*, *The Comet*, etc, as platforms for their anti-colonial campaign (Tsegyu and Ogoshi, 2016: 73- 74; Shaw, 2009: 493; Jibo, 2003: 214; Agbaje, 1993: 459). Indeed, Nigeria's most prominent nationalists and first post-independence Governor-General and later President, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe had by 1937 created the first newspaper chain, comprising of 8 newspapers at different parts of the country (Omu, 1978). With independence on the horizon in the 1950s however, the press succumbed to the ethno-regional fissions in the wider politics,

becoming inextricably linked to the dominant elites and political parties in the three regions that emerged at the adoption of the federal system in 1954. Each regional government was controlled by a different political party, comprising predominantly of members of the same geo-ethnic groups: Action Group (AG) mainly by the Yoruba in the West, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) comprised mainly of the Igbo in the East, while the Hausa-Fulani dominated Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the North. So too did the press. According to Idang (1973: 100), almost all newspapers during that period were owned and operated by the regional parties and were "therefore, intensely partisan" in editorial policy and output (in Jibo, 2003: 219). As one of Nigeria's foremost journalists, Peter Enahoro (1994) put it, most newspapers in the country are "in fact regional publications whose loyalties are to the personalities and courses espoused by the apparent majority of the people of that area. It is tantamount to a monopoly of a vital resource with a crucial bearing on the democratic process" (in Olukotun, 2004: 77). This ethno-regional partisanship of the press has remained a dominant feature of political reporting in Nigeria to date and is manifested in such varied contexts as the reporting of elections (Galadima and Enighe, 2001), conflicts (Omenuga, et al, 2015; Omenuga, 2004), and even reporting of corruption (Yusha'u, 2010; Jibo and Okoosi-Simbene, 2003; Ojo, 2003). For example, in her analysis of a specific interethnic conflict in 2002, Omenuga (2004) finds that coverage reflected the 'ethnic coloration' of the newspapers' ownership and geopolitical location in tone, content and even such basic statistical facts as casualty figures. Thus, she concludes that in Nigeria, "the newspapers are interested not in reporting the truth, as it is, the events as they occurred, but to construct and re-affirm their ethnic and cultural positions and identities" (ibid: 2004: 74).

The above may well be true. However, part of the explanation lies in the political economy of the press, rather than deliberate politicization of news. As mentioned earlier, many state governments also have their own newspapers or magazines, while the federal government owns two of the country's oldest newspapers, the *Daily Times* in Lagos, and the *New Nigerian* in Kaduna respectively. These government owned newspapers were established for a variety of political and developmental reasons and are funded and controlled by the governments that established them. And like in broadcasting, the journalists in these newspapers were also at once civil servants, although much like the private newspapers, state owned newspapers had tended to be independent. In the past, many of these were strong and had large readerships. But years of military governments and a stagnating economy means that many are now defunct or dormant, although a few have been resuscitated since return to democracy (Ciboh, 2007). For the private newspapers however, the story is different. Newsprint and machinery are imported against declining and volatile currency exchange market. This is aggravated by poor infrastructure in the country such as electricity and transport networks, resulting in higher production costs, for example in running diesel generators to power offices and presses, often located in different parts of the country (Oxford Business Group, 2013: 278). In the face of these, circulation figures have dwindled drastically from 400, 000 copies in the mid-1970s for *Daily Times* alone to less than 300,000 copies for all the top 15 dailies combined, though rising to about 600, 000 copies in an election year (Aliagan, 2015: 12; Oxford Business Group, 2013: 278). Wages are generally low, well below what other private businesses like banks and telecoms companies pay to graduate recruits, and often goes unpaid for many months for some of the newspapers, helping to fuel corruption in the sector itself (Adeyemi, 2013: 133; Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe, 2012: 514; Akinwale,

2010: 59). For all these however, some parts of the country fare better than others. Lagos is the commercial, industrial, educational and cultural nerve centre of Nigeria. Its GDP exceeds that of Kenya (*Economist*, 2013)⁸, and is therefore home to a larger percentage of the country's burgeoning middle class. These factors make Lagos and the South West attractive for newspaper publishing, and private media in general, which partly may explain the high concentration of private media in Lagos and Ibadan in the South West, and to a lesser extent Abuja and other major cities in both the North and South. Thus, being so situated, the press tends to reflect the dominant worldviews of its respective 'host' communities, sometimes in the form of sensational reporting or screaming headlines with little story body, all in a country that remains deeply polarized along ethnic, regional and sectarian lines.

1.5 Defining the research problem and brief outline of thesis:

The foregoing discussion represents the general context within which the present research is situated, namely the debates around democratization and corruption in Nigeria, and by inference, Africa and other developing democracies. Also, this chapter has opened a conceptual door between these debates on corruption and democratization on the one hand, and the press as part of civil society on the other. We have seen that questions about democratization in Nigeria are intimately connected to those of corruption, and within these, of civil society and the press; indeed, this scholarly connection between democratization and reduction of corruption or improvement of political accountability is not limited to Africa, but also to Eastern Europe (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). First, as detailed above, democratization in Africa is said to have been brought about through political opposition to authoritarian

⁸ The Economist (2013, 13 April) Nigeria: Lurching ahead www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21576135-africas-giant-waking-up-it-still-looks-unsteady-its-feet-lurching-ahead

regimes by civil society activism, grassroots mobilization and strategic counter discourses of human rights and accountability. Journalists and newspapers were said to have played prominent roles in these processes. For Nigeria particularly, the press has long been thought of as agents of democracy and accountability. Newspapers and magazines, we observed, have been deeply entwined in some of the major questions of political change and political development in the country, from the struggle to independence, to questions of managing ethnic and regional pluralism, to bringing an end to military intervention in politics, and by implication, bringing about democratization. Two decades after democratization in Africa and elsewhere however, scholars and policy makers have gone back to the structural features of African countries to explain democratic performance, resulting in several nomenclatures, or “democracy with adjectives” as Collier and Levitsky (1997) put it, for describing democracy in the developing world. One of these structural features, as Lynch and Crawford (2011: 275) point out in their review of research on democratization in Africa, is “endemic corruption”, which undermines democratic processes such as elections and effective power of citizens by impoverishing them. Corruption, then, “weakens democratic governance”, in general, but even more so for developing democracies (Gregory et al, 2012: 8). And for Nigeria specifically, as we have seen, some observers note that corruption is in fact, the very ‘bane’ of democratization because it undermines popular legitimacy, scuttles grassroots democratic development and threatens presents efforts at democratic consolidation, the same way it had led to the collapse of previous attempts (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011; Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010; Ogundiya, 2010a).

But again, in Africa, corruption itself is understood as a central feature and consequence of personalized rule or presidentialism, prebendalism, patronage and clientilism, the open sores of the state within which corruption is located

(Lynch and Crawford, 2011: 283; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994: 458). Thus, just as personalized rule, that is, rule by the bigman rather than by the constitution or political ideology legitimated through free and fair elections, is a feature of authoritarianism, it is also the cause of corruption. To dislodge both requires democratizing the state from bottom-up and ensuring greater freedom for individuals and civil society, including an independent media to challenge the state and hold it accountable (Lynch and Crawford, 2011: 291-292). In other words, the media, as the foremost organs of civil society, are assumed to play the dual function of furthering democratic development and ensuring political accountability, which in countries like Nigeria, simply means exposing corruption and engendering its reform (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011b: 187). As Jebril, Loveless and Stetka (2015) contend in their analysis of media and democratization research in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America, political socialization of citizens towards democratic values and behaviour as well as political accountability are the foremost issues of scholarly concern. But how are the media to do these, particularly, how would the media hold the state accountable? The answer, as I discuss in detail in the next chapter, is an old one: watchdog journalism, and by implication, investigative reporting. Herein lies the specific location of this research, although with a focus to Nigeria. Journalism and the press have long had connections to corruption, at least to its disclosure. Indeed, beyond studies of media and politics, the literature on corruption, from a variety of social science perspectives (politics, anthropology, sociology, public economics, etc) have long explored these connections. In one aspect, lower levels of press freedom correlates strongly with higher levels of corruption, a consistent finding of several researches in political science and public economics (Gregory et al, 2012; Brunetti and Weder, 2003). In another sense, press coverage of corruption influences measures of corruption based on

perceptions of it, in such a way that higher measures of corruption may be reflecting the degree of press freedom rather than incidence of corruption (Cordis and Milyo, 2016: 121; Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016: 20). Furthermore, Gupta (1995: 376) contends that the “discourse of corruption” is the prism through citizens imagine the state. But for Gupta, this discourse of corruption is itself constructed, and contested, in press coverage of corruption, particularly newspapers, so much that anthropologists who study corruption should pay attention to local media (ibid: 385). More significantly, some of this literature conceives newspapers and the press as institutions of accountability, or quite simply as an anti-corruption agency of sorts. In this sense, a free press is listed among ‘extra-governmental’ institutions that contribute to checking corruption such as strong civil society, competitive markets, property rights and so on (Johnston, 2014: 21; Mulgan, 2000: 563). As Holmes (2015: 116) point out in his concise introduction to corruption, in a democratic system, “the mass media, both print and electronic, have a significant role to play in combatting corruption. They can investigative allegations and publish their findings, and both directly and indirectly pressure the authorities to pursue the claims”. In other words, investigative reporting and press coverage of corruption are at the heart of these debates on the linkages between democratization and corruption in new democracies. This research, then, investigates the extent to which the press in Nigeria performs these functions over the nearly two decades of democratization in the country.

The next chapter links up some of these discussions with literature and research in mainstream political communication, particularly that concerns assumptions of liberal media in relation to press freedom, investigative reporting and corruption, comparatively from the established democracies, to societies under democratic transition in Africa and elsewhere, and finally Nigeria. This is to cast

a broad theoretical and empirical glance at the context within which the research is situated, as well as to outline how it contributes to the field, and hence the specific research questions. Chapter three outlines the methodology and research design on which data was collected, namely a triangulation of content analysis, participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews with investigative reporters, editors and others over two field trips in Nigeria. Following that, chapters four to seven present, analyse and discuss the data collected, both in connection to the research questions, as well as to the researcher's interpretation of the data. Chapter four presents content analysis data on press coverage of corruption. I find that corruption is extensively reported in Nigerian newspapers, accounting for over 8% of all frontpage news coverage in the newspapers sampled. But most of this coverage results, not from independent investigations of corruption by the newspapers, but from a longstanding 'anti-corruption culture' in Nigerian politics, by which I mean the general tendency by virtually all governments in Nigeria since independence, military and civilian alike, to make the fight or 'war against corruption' the centrepiece of policy and political action. Indeed, as a leading Nigerian journalist and author remarks recently, Nigerians always demand a fight against corruption from their governments (Adeniyi, 2017: 11), indicating a deeply entrenched anti-corruption culture, as I use the term here. But in the context of the longest period of democratization ever experienced in Nigeria⁹, that is, our research period, this anti-corruption culture finds renewed vigour and free expression. This renewed vigour can be seen, for example, in the activism of anti-corruption agencies and parliaments towards investigating corruption, or in literally hundreds of probe panels and reports on corruption in the country over

⁹ As noted above, the present period of democracy since 1999 is longest ever in Nigeria, following three previous and failed attempts to establish democracy in the country.

this period. The result is that the majority of corruption stories reported in the press are generated by the activities of what I call 'corruption-investigating-authorities' or CIAs for short. These are state-level agencies with permanent or adhoc statutory mandates for investigating and publicising corruption, rather than investigative reporting by newspapers or journalists. Thus, I argue, in chapter five, that at best Nigerian newspapers are strong watchdogs, but weak investigators regarding journalistic reporting of corruption. In chapter six, I examine the organizational and operational context of investigative reporting in the newspapers sampled, by drawing on ethnographic data from the interviews and observation. I find that investigative journalism is scarcely institutionalized in the newspapers and is no more than adhoc practice by the few journalists who do not. The result is that there is limited investigative stories of corruption in the press, less than 5% of overall coverage of corruption. But again, by comparing corruption stories independently investigated by the newspapers to those reported from the CIAs, I show, in chapter seven, that investigative reporting is not only low in terms of quantity of reporting, but also in terms of the scale of corruption independently reported in comparison to the corruption cases exposed by the CIAs.

Chapter Two: Literature review and theory

2.1 Introduction: Liberal media theory: Universals and particulars

Liberal thought on the centrality of free media in a democratic society is legion, dating to the origins of modern democratic theory and practice. It can be seen in the writings of philosophers and theorists like Thomas Paine and de Tocqueville, and statesmen like Jefferson and Madison (Besley and Prat, 2006: 720; Carpini, 2005: 27). It also forms part of 18th century constitutions like those of the U.S and Sweden, and in early reports of inquiries into the press such as Hutchins and Royal Commissions on the Press in the U.S and Britain respectively (Curran, 2007: 33; Nord, 2007: 517). Much the same idea runs through all these. For example, in one of his letters, James Madison wrote that "a popular government, without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both" (in Carpini, 2005: 27). Madison's point is that the press is the 'means of acquiring popular information', without which democracy will be reduced to a parody. This indicates the significance of the press in a democracy. For Thomas Jefferson, the press is even more vital to democracy than the government itself, as he would choose press over government for democracy (Golden and Golden, 1993: 194). It is not surprising then that these ideas form the core of the First Amendment in the U.S Constitution and have been enshrined in many democratic constitutions around the world (Street, 2011: 303).

The liberal ideal stipulates three interconnected functions for the media in a democracy: to provide public information to enable citizens to make informed choices and decisions; forum for political and policy debates; and 'watchdog' against the state and other powerful members or institutions in society

(Voltmer, 2013: 26; Aalberg and Curran, 2012; McNair, 2011; Davis, 2010a; 2007; Curran, 2007; 2002; Louw, 2010). First, the media are collectively expected to provide the public with the necessary information they need to be able to make sense of political events and to participate fully in the democratic process as an engaged and engaging citizenry. Secondly, the media should provide a platform for debate among the widest possible view points on the political and ideological spectrum. Also, this principle implies that the media should provide a “linkage” between citizens and policy makers to debate and form public opinion on all matters of public interest before, during and even after these matters are formulated into policy or enacted into laws (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer, 2010; Kennamer, 1992). Finally, the media are regarded as a government ‘watchdog’ that monitors the exercise of power by public officials and institutions to safeguard the rights of the citizens and keep the state in its proper constitutional and legal boundaries. This is to be achieved through watchdog or investigative journalism by the media to expose instances of corruption and abuses of power as famously illustrated by the *Washington Post*’s ‘Watergate’ case and others like it (Louw, 2010: 53; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004b: 1144). The present research is concerned with this third function of the press, that is, the watchdog function, often considered as the most important (Davies, 2009: 2; Jones, 2009: 5).

Dahlgren (2009) has argued that these functions of the media in a democracy derive from strands of democratic theory concerning the exercise of political power, and citizenship and citizen participation in the political process in a democracy. Furthermore, these ideals also form part journalistic identity, since a recognition of the functions of the media in a democracy helps to ensure the extent freedom media and journalists enjoy (Mellado, 2015: 596). But it is also through these roles that media democratic performance is often judged by

citizens and scholarly observers alike. In addition, assumptions about the democratic functions of the media also shape media policy, at least media policy about the content and form of media regulation in a democratic society (McQuail, 2005: 196; Davis, 2007: 4). In a sense, much of what goes as political communication research, both theoretically and empirically, is informed and concerned with the finer details of these democratic functions of the media: at the level of individual media organizations, the media system of a country, or even larger comparative studies at regional or global levels. For example, the work of Freedom House on the press, which has been influential in many fields beyond political communication, is based on assumptions about the extent to which individual countries or media systems move closer to the normative ideal of the press in a democracy (Becker, Vlad and Nusser, 2007). But more significantly for this research, liberal media theory has served as a model for many countries and societies undergoing democratic transition in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa (Voltmer, 2013; Hallin and Mancini, 2012). In short, the liberal media model tends to be universally influential in theory or application, or both (Hallin and Mancini, 2010: 113). Surveys and interviews of journalists in many countries around the world suggest that liberal journalistic norms such as reporting the news as it is, provision of political information and acting as a watchdog of the government are ranked among the top role perceptions journalists hold everywhere (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2016; Weaver and Willnat, 2012; Hanitzsch et al, 2011; Berkowitz, 2007; Herscovitz, 2004).

Still, the liberal model is historically and culturally located (Curran and Park, 2000: 3) and can be problematic when uncritically extrapolated to other contexts. For example, Meyer (2002: 1) has observed that “democracy is not possible without a functioning public sphere that puts the individual in a position to decide and act autonomously”. This point reflects the unending debate about

the central place of ‘quality’ political information in the democratic process evident in many researches about the media, democracy and public knowledge (Aalberg and Curran, 2012; Street, 2011; Curran et al, 2009; Carpini, 2005; Prior, 2003; Zaller, 2003; Baum, 2002). But Meyer’s point is also an affirmation of individualism which is hardly a universal norm. In Africa at least, personhood and agency are often embedded in a ‘politics of belonging’ and thus tied in to the expectations of others in some cultural or regional communities (Nyamnjoh, 2005). In such contexts, political information provided by the media may not necessarily be understood or acted upon ‘autonomously’ by the individual. Furthermore, policy debates, if they exist at all, may not be presented or perceived simply in terms of ideological divisions of Left versus Right as in the West. In Nigeria and many other African countries, politics is less a matter of ideology than of ethnic, regional and religious identity considerations. In addition to this, the media system itself is similarly structured and thus often ends up promoting centrifugal forces and tensions within the political system and the society (Kalyango, 2010: 6-7; Mukhongo, 2010: 348-350; Nyamnjoh, 2005: 57; Agbaje, 1993: 460). This often takes a violent turn, as in the extreme case of the Rwandan genocide in which the media were indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for playing ‘an undoubted’ role (Thompson, 2007: 2). This example indicates limitations for the liberal model as applied in different political, cultural and historical contexts. This study is grounded within liberal theory of the media, due to the centrality of press freedom and investigative journalism to the research. However, I approach it with the assumption that the performance of a liberal press depends not so much on its normative principles or media policy and regulatory framework, important as these are, but also on the specific contexts of political culture within which the press operates (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). I illustrate this argument empirically

in the next chapters. At this point, I examine further two crucial norms of the liberal press, namely, press freedom and watchdog journalism, and their connection, specifically, to investigative reporting and press coverage of corruption in Nigeria.

2.2 Norms of liberal press: Press freedom and watchdog journalism:

For McQuail (2005:169), press freedom, or the idea that the press should be free of restrictions to enable it to perform its democratic duty, is the most respected of all theories of the press in Western democratic tradition. In its classic essence, it refers to freedom from the state which had historically been the main agent of press censorship, and from which the press had struggled to first establish its own freedom, and then worked to advance the cause of freedom and democracy in the wider society (Curran, 2002). In other words, press freedom, whatever its intrinsic value, also has an immediate instrumental dimension, that is, to enable the press to work in the service of democracy through watchdog journalism and other functions. Without press freedom, then, watchdog journalism is impossible, since the concept of the watchdog presupposes a *vertical* source of accountability on the state or its agents. Voltmer (2013: 28) remarks that the press requires only a “minimum of regulation and a maximum of rights”. Her point is that since watchdog role presupposes holding the state to account, it is only fitting that the press be free and independent from the control of those it monitors, so that journalists can take a “proactive, adversarial role vis-à-vis political officials” (*ibid*). This narrative of a causal relationship between a free press and political accountability in a democratic society is what makes press freedom attractive to developing democracies, and therefore a central concept in comparative political communication research. In sum, press freedom is nowadays conceived in terms of media autonomy from the state, but also in terms of autonomy from the market, ownership, editorial management

and even by individual journalists (Nam, 2012: 552, Street, 2011: 167-176; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011: 404). Moreover, a strand of this research suggests, with mounting 'econometric' evidence that press freedom is correlated with levels of official corruption across countries, such that the higher the extent of freedom and diversity in the press, the lower the levels of corruption (Camaj, 2013; Kalenborn and Lessmann, 2013; Nam, 2012; Whitten-Wooding and James, 2012; Besley and Prat, 2006; Chowdhury, 2004; Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Djankov et al, 2003). But such econometric evidence ignores or holds constant several crucial variables that mediate the distance between press freedom and reduction in corruption. At most, newspapers can expose corruption. But the effectiveness of such press exposures in leading to reform will depend not on newspapers, but other political actors, such as the willingness and ability of the judicial branch or parliament. Furthermore, other actors such as anti-corruption agencies may in fact play more crucial role than the media in reducing corruption. And it is difficult to imagine how the impact of the press alone can be isolated, since the media are but an integral, not necessarily independent, part of what can be called anti-corruption complex comprising the judiciary and the courts, the legislature, demonstrable political will of the executive, the press and so on. For example, Stetka and Örnebring (2013) contend that in the context new democracies in Eastern Europe, journalists report that their investigations of corruption hardly result in resignation of the officials exposed for corruption, let alone to instigate reforms. Similarly, Waisbord (2000: 210-216) is quite sceptical about the extent to which investigative reporting in South America has led to any significant changes or reforms in policy across the region, and even citizens tend to be much more concerned about media revelations of human rights abuses, than of corruption. Rønning (2009: 156) makes a similar observation in the case of Africa where, he contends, politicians are generally

unperturbed by the ‘pillory effect’ or ‘naming and shaming’ effect of investigative reporting in the absence of effective legal punishment for corruption or other wrongdoing. Moreover, Gunaratne (2002) has argued that press freedom may not mean the same thing in different societies, since societies differ in their understanding of ‘freedom’ in the first place. And in the specific case of many new democracies arriving the theoretical and empirical scene of liberal watchdog journalism in recent years, media independence still does not necessarily guarantee investigative practice (Voltmer, 2013: 104). In other words, press freedom is one thing, reduction in corruption another, and the causal link between one and the other can be much more complicated than quantitative evidence would allow as the observations above indicate for much of developing democracies in vastly different regions.

But more significantly, this empirical evidence which predicts lower corruption for higher freedom of the press is itself predicated on the ‘watchdog’ role of the press, which is often regarded as most important function of the media in a democracy due to its accountability or monitoring function (Jones, 2009: 5-6; Curran, 2007: 33; Feldstein, 2006: 105). For example, Pippa Norris has observed that the question of how the media serves the democratic process is to be considered in terms of its ‘institutional’ role as watchdogs over the powerful, in addition to their agenda-setting and gate-keeping functions (Norris and Odugbemi, 2010: 5). Moreover, watchdog journalism is privileged above other democratic functions of the press because classical liberal theory assumed that publicity and openness were the most effective guarantees from the corrupting influence of power. Hence, this notion of journalists and the press as watchdogs who tell truth to power has become embedded in journalism’s self-definition (Coronel, 2010: 111), or rather its very professional ideology (Broersma, 2010: 21). But how is watchdog journalism realised in practice?

Empirical evidence on this question, in the context of the Swedish press at least, suggests that the watchdog function is ‘enacted’ at two key moments in the production of political news (Eriksson and Östman, 2013). Journalists demonstrate ‘cooperation’ with politicians at the first ‘interactional’ phase of news production in which journalists interact directly or indirectly with politicians, in say press conferences, since cooperation serves both parties and ensures a longer-term access to the journalist. But the point of news construction and publishing, reporters tend to be more adversarial and questions of politicians (ibid: 304). The differences in journalistic performance between these two stages, the authors argue, are to be understood in terms of journalism’s ‘strategic ritual’ in projecting itself as scrutineer of power (Eriksson and Östman, 2013: 321). In a similar research, Gnisi et al (2014) contend that watchdog journalism and its adversarialism are enacted interviews with politicians, particularly during elections. Their research is based on content analysis of interviews with politicians in Italian television, in which they measure the ‘level of toughness of questions’ journalists pose to politicians during such interviews. Their findings suggest that in such contexts, journalists are more adversarial towards politicians leading in the polls¹⁰, although more senior journalists are less adversarial to all; that politicians of less known parties face tougher questions and that some of the ‘toughness’ exhibited by journalists when questioning politicians on television can be due more to the journalists’ own political affiliation than the watchdog principle per se. Thus, they conclude that journalistic adversarialism, on television at least, can be predicted by the power of the politician, the political affiliation and status of the interviewer

¹⁰ In an article in the *London Review of Books*, Rebecca Solnit makes a somewhat similar argument about the U.S 2016 general election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, although from a feminist perspective. Her argument is that Hillary faced far tougher scrutiny than Donald Trump, because she is a woman, not because she was thought more likely to win the election as Gnisi et al (2014) research suggests (Solnit, R. (2017) ‘From lying to leering: Donald Trump’s fear of women’, *London Review of Books*, 39(2):3-7).

(Gnisi et al, 2014: 112). The point of these studies is to illustrate that in practice, watchdog journalism encompasses a wide range of different journalistic activities practices broadly lumped together under the same label of watchdog journalism and which can be performed at several moments of the reporting process (Coronel, 2010).

In her typology of news contents denoting how various journalistic role perceptions are ‘performed’ in actual news output, Mellado (2015: 602) suggests that all news types that involve ‘questioning,’ ‘critique’, ‘denouncing’, ‘conflict’, coverage of ‘trials and processes’, ‘external research’ and ‘investigative reporting’ are to be considered varying degrees of performing the watchdog role. That is, while investigative reporting is regarded as the most important aspect of watchdog journalism, it is not the only one. This finer distinction between varying degrees of watchdog journalism is important because findings of this study indicate that Nigerian newspapers could be regarded as strong watchdogs, but weak investigators in relation to reporting of corruption. Independent investigative reporting of corruption is scant in the newspapers, but overall coverage of corruption is extensive. Equally significant, our findings illustrate that investigative reporting and coverage of corruption, in the specific context of Nigeria, are shaped as much by the regulatory environment or political economy of the press, as by the lingering culture of anti-corruption in the country, perhaps even more. In other words, watchdog journalism represents a broad journalistic concept, and practice, from critical political commentary, to questioning and fact checking, to in-depth analysis of news, or what Fink and Schudson (2014) call contextual reporting, and of course, independent investigative reporting of corruption, wrongdoing and even social ills. It is useful, at this point then, to examine investigative reporting itself and its connections to reporting of corruption in detail, both elsewhere and in Nigeria.

2.3 Investigative reporting as a liberal norm:

As noted above, watchdog journalism covers different practices. Yet, within these practices, investigative reporting is ranked highest, since it presupposes independent initiative on the part of the reporter or their media. Thus, in this functionalist ranking of news, investigative reporting is regarded as second to none, that is, the ‘iron-core’ of democratic journalism (Jones, 2009: 5). As Nord (2007: 518) points out, “investigative journalism is universally perceived as the cornerstone of journalistic practice and a more or less uncontroversial function of independent media organizations in a free and democratic society”. It is for this “uncontroversial function” of investigative reporting to democracy, that is to expose wrongdoing and hold the powerful to account, that Mary Walton (2010: 19) describes investigative reporters as the “elite special forces of Fourth Estate’s armies”, higher in rank and professionalism than other journalists. In addition, one reason why it is “universally” regarded as “the cornerstone” of journalism by both practitioners and observers alike is because it stresses the independent initiative of the reporter or their media in generating the story, in the way other kinds of journalistic practices do not. In fact, definitions of it vary not much because it means different things to different scholars as because of what sets it apart from other kinds of reporting practices. Therefore, in defining investigative reporting, several scholars have emphasised journalistic initiative, the rigour of methodology used in collecting evidence and writing up the story, and the impact of the story on the social and political institutions and processes (Lanosga, 2015; Starkman, 2014; Stetka and Örnebring, 2012; Jones, 2009; Ettema and Glasser, 2007; Feldstein, 2006; Blavens 1997; Protess et al, 1992). Furthermore, Pilger (2005) also notes that the highest form of investigative journalism is that which investigates, not just wrongdoing or governance failure, but also ideas; to investigative ideas and lay them bare for the public, since ideas

can be more influential in shaping the direction of society. Ettema and Glasser (1998: 189) identify three ‘core values’ that inform the democratic potentials of investigative journalism, namely: *publicity* (bringing abuse of power into public attention to instigate reforms), *accountability* (calling wrongdoers into account) and *solidarity* or creating bonds of compassion between the public and victims of wrongdoing. Finally, investigative journalism is said to be particularly effective in checking violations of the human rights of citizens, or breaches of rules in ways that go against public interest, for example when the state crosses its boundaries during protests by citizens, or when actors in the market breach rules for private motives (Whitten-Woodring and James, 2012: 120; Bonner, 2009: 296; Waisbord, 2004: 1090). I follow Lanosga (2015: 370) who defines investigative journalism as a “comprehensive, in-depth reporting about public affairs that involves wrongdoing, failure or social problems brought to light by journalists”. This is useful because it implies uncovering ‘corruption’ in some sense; that is, as wrong doing; that is, I restrict the definition to investigative stories of corruption. In addition, it also corresponds to how Nigerian reporters interviewed here understand investigative journalism.

However, investigative journalism is not always praised. Neither the ideal nor the practice is without critics. First, investigative journalism is criticised for going to sleep when the public needs it the most, particularly for failing to investigate and report the regulatory failures and malfeasance that led to the near collapse of the global economy in 2007/2008 (Starkman, 2014). Secondly, is said to exhibit double moral standards by invoking two conflicting values of ‘detached observer’ and ‘custodian of conscience’ (Glasser and Ettema, 1998: 1-9), at least in American Journalism. Secondly, this paradox of ‘objectivity’ and ‘watchdog’ is often responsible for the media’s notable failures in investigating official claims, especially during political or economic crisis (Cunningham, 2003: 1-5), or which

make investigative journalists fall prey to manipulative media strategies of interested parties in the media in the name of providing ‘leaks’ to official wrongdoing (Feldstein, 2007: 546-457). In addition, Waisbord (1997a: 121-124) argues that investigative journalism’s claim to ‘truth-telling’ can only be an approximation at best, since investigative reporters often depend for sources with powerful political and economic interests of their own. In this way, media scandals about corruption and wrongdoing, may be no more than coverage of ongoing conflicts among political and economic actors, rather than simply the initiative and effort of ‘solitary’ investigative reporters (Waisbord, 1996: 344). Waisbord is here questioning the supposed ‘independence’ of investigative reporters, since ultimately, they lack direct experience of the events, corruption and wrongdoing they expose. Similarly, in his study of investigative reporting in television documentaries, Raphael (2005: 248) reasons that while investigative reporters frequently target public officials and institutions, these same groups are often among its best sources, collaborators and even protectors (in Lanosga, 2015: 371). Indeed, for Altschull (1995) by merely exposing instances of corruption or regulatory failure, investigative reporting is in fact protecting the capitalist system, rather than exposing its underlying systemic contradictions (in Lanosga, 2017: 368). For this reason, investigative reporting in mid-twentieth century U.S leftist magazines sought not only to expose individual cases of corruption but interpreted these cases as evidence of the failure of the capitalist system itself and called for its outright overturn (Aucoin, 2007: 562). Others worry about increasing ‘celebritization’ of investigative reporting, or of the rise of scandal politics which has transformed Watergate into ‘Zippergate’ or ‘churnalism’ in the media, thereby undermining the democratic potentials of the press (Street, 2011: 192; Castells, 2010: 6-7; Davies, 2009; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004b: 1145; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004a; 2004b; Tumber, 2004).

For new democracies in Africa and elsewhere, problems of investigative reporting highlighted above are compounded by legacies of authoritarian past for press and politics, since a new democracy has but a short democratic memory. Waisbord (2000b:44) shows that while South American journalism has long been influenced by Euro-American liberal models, attempts at practical application have resulted into what he describes as fitting ‘square pegs into round holes’ because of the obvious conceptual and practical gaps between liberal values and illiberal political environments. Furthermore, Waisbord notes that the media are precariously situated between the ‘rock’ of the state and the ‘hard place’ of the market. But this statement in fact sums up much research on media and democratization in the region by Waisbord himself and others (Stein, 2013; Pinto, 2009; 2008). Also, in the former communist countries of Europe, the media remain “constrained by forces of the social subsystems, particularly politics and economy” (Stetka, 2012: 435-436), a situation worsened by the trend toward ‘de-Westernization’ of media ownership whereby local elites with ties to local and international business and politics are taking over ownership of the media (ibid: 439). Furthermore, in most of the region, the media are characterised in varying degrees by increasing ‘instrumentalization’ and ‘clientilism’, both of which are features of the high degree of the political and economic parallelism of the media. The result is that the media tends to be deeply implicated into informal clientelist networks of elites in politics, business and the bureaucracy who use the media to further their own political and economic interests and ambitions, especially during elections (Coman and Gross, 2012: 469-472; Örnebring, 2012: 505; Pfetsch and Voltmer, 2012: 402; Stetka: 2012:446; Szabó and Kiss, 2012: 480; Kovacic and Erjavec, 2011: 329). For example, Coman and Gross (2012: 464) observe that in Bulgaria, while the political structures replicate Western models, the hierarchical structures and

values of the former communist political environment continue to prevail, making any practical application of the watchdog journalism problematic. Such contextual ambivalences have resulted in peculiar media behaviour like ‘advertisorials’ or positive and promotional news content prepaid for by external interests and ‘Kompromat’ or negative profiling of political and business opponents often passed off as investigative reporting, without or without facts (Örnebring, 2012: 506). Thus, investigative journalism in these new democracies is seldom the product of independent journalistic effort or initiative (Stetka and Örnebring: 2013: 420).

Similar observations as the foregoing have been made for Africa. First, according to Nyamnjoh (2005: 3), “African media continue to extol liberal democracy and liberal media, their practices can be very different, even contradictory”. In Ghana, Hasty (2005a) observes such contradictions, saying that while Ghanaian journalists locate themselves within the universal discourse of liberal journalism, their everyday practices can be profoundly particular, shaped by historicized cultural understandings of political authority and resistance as well as notions of African sociality and discursive propriety” (Hasty, 2005a: 5). Secondly, African media have long invoked two competing, even contradictory, professional values: a statist ‘development journalism’ model and ‘civil society’, ‘public sphere’ watchdog model, both of which are variously influential among journalists and scholars alike (Kalyango, 2010: 2; Hasty, 2005a:11; Musa, 1997: 141). The result of this contradiction is a confusion of roles, norms and practices among journalists working for different media, often leading to internal tensions within their ranks or unions (Hasty, 2005a). A second general concern of media and democratization research regards media freedom, especially in respect of critical Fourth Estate reporting. As Wasserman (2011: 111) points out, “press freedom, development and democracy are the core issues of journalistic

research and theory in the developing world”. Third, researchers are concerned by African variants of ‘kompromat’ and ‘advertisorials’ which exist in much of journalism on the continent under different names like ‘Brown Envelope Journalism’, ‘Gambo’, ‘Soli’, etc, depending on local parlance (Kasoma, 2009:26; Lodamo and Skjerdal, 2009: 140-141; Rønning, 2009: 167; Ndangam, 2006: 179). In general, this is a practice whereby journalists solicit for or are given money, freebies, kickbacks and other kinds of rewards for news publication by government officials or other news sources. The above examples therefore illustrate what Tong (2012: 1), speaking of investigative journalism in China, observes that the nature of investigative reporting and journalistic work more broadly is “socially situated and contextually constructed”, as we shall see here in the specific case of Nigeria. So far, we have examined press freedom, watchdog journalism and investigative reporting around the world. This represents the general literature within which this research is situated. In the following two sections, I focus specifically on Nigeria.

2.4 Press freedom in Nigerian:

Almost by a rare scholarly consensus, Nigeria is said to have the freest press in Africa (Oso, 2013: 17; Dare, 2011: 12; Hall, 2009: 256; Rønning, 2009: 165; Olukotun, 2000a: 33; Eribo and Tanjong, 1998: 43). According to Omu (1968: 285) has noted that by the end of the 19th century, Nigeria already had “unfettered press” partly due to the reluctance of *some* colonial administrators to actively persecute the press and partly because African journalists at the time, most of whom also doubled as ‘nationalists’ in the independence struggle, were convinced that press freedom was theirs to enjoy as British subjects, much like the journalists in metropolitan Britain itself. Agbaje (1993: 458) argues that the Nigerian press had gained its freedom by building long-standing alliances with other “powerful elements in civil society”, such as professional associations and

trade unions. And whenever occasion has demanded, the press draws upon these alliances to “hold on to and expand its sphere of autonomous action” in relation to the state. Another is that, press freedom, understood as absence of governmental control (Kasoma, 1995: 537) is explained by a deeply entrenched liberal ideal and its emphasis on a free press. As Oso (2013: 17) observes, “liberal ideas” of free press and watchdog journalism have been espoused and practiced by the Nigerian press since before independence. This professional ideology of the Nigerian press has had two consequences. First, it explains why newspapers in Nigeria have tended to be overwhelmingly owned and controlled by private individuals or organizations. Secondly, it partly explains why print and broadcasting in the country operate, in general at least, on two different professional ideologies and regulatory environments. In the print media, the ideology of Fourth Estate journalism is dominant, while development journalism is more dominant in broadcast media. Broadcasting came of age in Nigeria during the golden period of ‘the ideology of development’ in Africa, following independence in the 1960s (Odhiambo, 1991: 20), bringing with it the idea of development journalism in which the media in the developing world are expected to facilitate national development (Xiaoge, 2009: 357; Musa and Domatob, 2007: 316).

By contrast, spurred on by a liberal ideology and private ownership, the print press has been at the forefront of the defence of press freedom since the colonial period (1914-1960), but especially during its many brushes with various military governments in the 1970s through 1999. Many incidences have been cited to illustrate state repression of the press, and in turn media defence of it. For example, on 30 July 1973, Minere Amakiri, then chief correspondent of the *Nigerian Observer* (now defunct) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State wrote a story in his paper about looming industrial action by the teachers’ union in the state. But

the then Rivers State Military Governor, Navy Commander Alfred Diete-Spiff, who happened to be celebrating his birthday that same day, found the story an “embarrassment” and ordered Amakiri be detained, shaved and whipped 24 strokes of the cane on his bare back. In analysing this event, Ogbondah (1991: 111-113) contends that it sparked off media outrage and condemnation across the country because it was the first time physical violence would be used against a journalist on duty in Nigeria. Therefore, he concludes that “the press resented the action because it was concerned that such an action could potentially incapacitate its watchdog function... The press felt that, if it was going to be successful as a watchdog, the Amakiri-style governmental action taken to muzzle the media must not be condoned” (ibid: 121). From that point however, state repression got worse as successive military regimes promulgated various decrees aimed at muzzling the press. For example, Ogbondah (1994: 22-23) enumerates a total of nine different decrees by which various military governments sought to muzzle the press between 1967-1979 and 1983-1993. One such decree, the ‘Public Officers Protection against False Accusation Decree No. 11 of 1976’ expressly made it an offence liable by imprisonment or fine for ‘anyone to publish a false report or rumour alleging that a government official was corrupt’ (ibid:23). The most infamous of these decrees however, was the Public Officers Protection against False Accusation Decree No. 4 of 1984, more popularly known simply as Decree 4, which “criminalized false press reports, written statements or rumours that exposed an officer of the military government, a state or the federal government” (Ogbondah, 1992: 10). Furthermore, both the author and publisher of a story were guilty of an offence punishable by imprisonment and or fines, if (a) the publication is false in its entirety; (b) the allegation made in the publication is made in every material detail; and (c) even if the whole story was true but embarrassed the government

(Pate, 2011: 97). Under this decree, two reporters with *The Guardian*, Nduka Irabor and Tunde Thompson were sentenced to one year in prison, while the paper itself paid N50, 000 (then \$20,000, now about \$250,000) for reporting and publishing a scoop on the government's redeployment of its diplomatic staff which contained one inaccuracy (Pate, 2011: 97; Uko, 2004: 90-91). Thus, the 1984 decree had merely upped the 'game' in the 1976 version by making it an offense to publish a story 'that embarrassed the government', even if it was true. Such repressive measures against the press, several studies have noted, even became more draconian during the twilight years of the military in the late 1990s, including banning of publications, outright mass purchases of editions, withdrawal of government advertisement from oppositional publications, arrest, torture and detention of journalists without trial or access to legal services or intimidation of journalists' friends and family members (Akinfemisoye, 2013: 9; Alozieuwa, 2012: 378; Ojebode, 2011: 267-268; Akinwale, 2010: 50; Sowunmi et al, 2010: 8-10; Olukotun, 2002: 323-324; Eribo and Tanjong, 1998: 43; Agbaje, 1990: 226)¹¹.

Yet, all this only emboldened the press, the argument goes, to fight on in defence of its cherished freedom, and consequently, even the military could not reign in the press (Oso, 2013: 17; Olayiwola, 1991: 36). One outcome is that constitutional guarantees for press freedom have formed part of all constitutional debates and arrangements throughout the various transition to democracy programmes overseen by the military in the country. For example, Section 22 of the current 1999 Constitution¹² guarantees press freedom, in

¹¹ It should be noted, however, that although all the researches above cited instances of military suppression of the press, these were more or less *the same* examples cited by the different authors, implying that the events in question are few. Virtually every study on press and politics in Nigeria has cited the same example of journalists detained under Decree 4 above, meaning that these were the only cases in which the law was put to use.

¹² Between 1960 and 1999, Nigeria had about 7 different constitutional assemblies, each of which culminated in the adoption of a particular constitution, though some of these were never in operation for one day, as they

addition to Freedom of Information Act in force since 2011 (Ojebode, 2011: 270).

The Freedom of Information Bill was passed into in Nigeria in May 2011 by then President Goodluck Jonathan, after years of bickering and buck passing between both houses of the federal legislature and the presidency on the one hand, and legislative advocacy and pressure by the media and civil society groups on the other (Ojebode, 2011: 268). The Freedom of Information Act (2011) began life as the 'Draft Access to Public Records and Information Bill' sponsored by a coalition of three civil society groups (Nigerian Union of Journalists, Media Rights Agenda, and the Civil Liberties Organization) during the aborted Third Republic in 1993, that is, six years before return to democracy in 1999 (Berliner, 2014: 483; Ojebode, 2011: 269). These groups kept up their collaborative efforts during the years leading to return to democracy through a series of meetings to fine-tune provisions of the bill, with support from external groups such as Article 19 (Ojebode, 2011: 270). In 2000, two former journalists turned members of the federal House of Representatives, Tony Anyanwun and Nduka Irabor¹³ sponsored this draft before parliament and there began nine years of back and forth debates between the federal legislature and the presidency, culminating in the passing bill into law in 2011, after several changes to its original provisions.

Berliner (2014: 484) observed that former President Obasanjo was reluctant to sign the bill into law on several occasions, after it had passed in both the Senate and House during 2004 and 2006 respectively, despite his proclamations about anti-corruption and transparency. But according to a newspaper editorial (*The*

died along with the transition to democracy programmes for which they were designed. Thus, the last of these, the 1999 Constitution, presently in operation, is the longest running constitution in the country.

¹³ As noted above, Nduka Irabor was one of two journalists sentenced to life imprisonment under Decree 4, Nigeria's most draconian libel law in 1984.

Guardian 2008), the former president was reluctant to sign the bill because he thought it did not provide for sufficient exceptions about national security. The editorial notes further that he preferred ‘Right to Information’ to ‘Freedom of Information’ in the title of the bill. Furthermore, the legislatures too had amended some of the bill’s provisions, requiring journalists to obtain court orders even before requesting for certain ‘sensitive’ information from public offices and officials. Yet, the media and other civil society groups kept up the pressure until a compromise was reached between all parties and the bill was assented to by then sitting President Goodluck Jonathan in 2011.

Among its provisions, the FOI Act aims to make information more freely available to Nigerians, not only journalists, to improve access to and provide protection for public records, to protect journalists and officials who disclose official information in the public interest, etc. Moreover, the law was specifically designed to further the fight against corruption with provisions that compel public officials to disclose information, while providing protections for whistleblowers “who can be allies for investigative journalists” (Ojebode, 2011: 278). In this sense, the Freedom of Information Act itself is better understood as part of the media’s long drawn struggle for its freedom from the state as well as to further democratic development in the country as described above.

But even before this law, for almost a century, attempts by various governments to regulate the press were successfully rebuffed by the press, until 1992 when the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) was established jointly by the federal government and the Nigerian Press Organization, an amalgam of industry associations (Christopher and Onwuka, 2013: 33). Even then, the NPC has been mostly ineffective and hamstrung. Consequently, in the opinion of some observers, journalists and media owners continue to “exult in unrestricted press

“freedom” without due regards to professional ethics (Christopher and Onwuka, 2013: 33). Overall then, most of press history in Nigeria is the story of how the press has established and expanded its freedom and sphere of operation within the political system. This then raises the question of what the press does with its freedom. If the struggle for press freedom has been a recurring feature of political development in Nigeria, as shown above, what then does the press do with the freedom so gained? The answer, in the literature at least, is that the press has used its freedom to advance the course of democracy and good governance by, among other things, fighting against corruption through investigative journalism, or more broadly, watchdog journalism. And it is to this that I now turn.

2.5: Watchdog journalism and investigative reporting in Nigeria:

Political communication research in Africa addresses investigative journalism under ‘media and democratization in Africa’, ‘good governance’, or ‘accountability’, implied by a generic ‘watchdog’ role of the media as an institution of ‘civil society’. In this regard, some studies argue that African media have played important roles in Africa’s struggle for independence against colonial rule and for return to popular democracy, through press criticisms of colonial administrations or by its exposure of bad governance and corruption of sit-tight military or civilian African governments (Mukhongo, 2010: 340; Shaw, 2009: 494-496; Tettey, 2001: 5-6; Kasoma, 1995: 537). Indeed, by one account, this watchdog function of the African media has its roots in traditional African communication systems in which local cultural figures such as griots, bards, comedians and musicians deployed satire to criticise traditional social and political order, and hence serving as watchdog to society (Shaw, 2009: 494). For Shaw, this function was taken up by educated Africans in the newspapers they established and were often stringent in their criticisms of the human rights

abuses, breaches and corruption of the colonial government, and indeed of the colonial system in general. During this period, it is believed, “the press rivalled the colonial government” in political impact (Omu, 1968: 279), because African journalists thought that in the absence of elected governments in the colonies, the press “was the most effective constitutional weapon for ventilating grievances and influencing the trend of events” (ibid). Olukotun (2004: 74) contends that colonial governors in Nigeria were known to complain “bitterly” about the critical coverage of colonial administrative affairs by newspapers like *The Comet* and *West African Pilot* which were active in the 1930s and 1940s. This anti-colonial instinct in the African press, for Shaw (2009: 496) later “proved quite instrumental in the struggle for independence” on the continent in the 1960s (ibid: 496).

The press renewed its adversarial stance against corruption during Nigeria’s first independent government in the 1960s. Olukotun (2004) notes that newspapers targeted Nigerian politicians, ministers and top civil servants and criticized them for their corruption and ostentatious life style. For example, in 1965, the *Daily Times*, then privately owned, exposed a land scam in Lagos, allegedly by then Minister for State, M.K.O. Mbadiwe and called on him to resign, and a few years later, it successfully forced the resignation of then Minister for Communications, J. S. Tarka over allegations of corruption (Olukotun, 2004: 74; Jibo and Okoosi-Simbene, 2003: 181). Thus, press exposure of corruption, human rights abuses and general ‘abuse of office’, became even more relentless during the years of various military dictatorships in the country, ultimately leading to the collapse of military governments and their disengagement from Nigerian politics altogether (Olukotun, 2002a: 318; 2002b: 210-211; Obadare, 1999: 38; Ihonvebere, 1996: 206, 211-212; Kieh and Agbese, 1993: 419-420). On this, Olukotun (2002a) and Dare (1998) provide details of how the press resorted to

‘underground’ or ‘guerrilla’ journalism by deploying unconventional means of news gathering and reporting to get pro-democracy news out to the public while at the same time escaping the long arms of the state during the closing years of the military in the late 1990s.

Similarly, others believe that the media in Africa has contributed towards democratization on the continent from the 1990s to date, by giving people voice, demanding democratic governance and generally supporting other critical elements within African states (Mukhongo, 2010: 340). Tetty (2001: 9-11) claims that private newspapers in countries like Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria were “very active in exposing activities within the state that would otherwise have been unknown to the citizenry”. Thus, he concludes that the private media contribute “in significant ways towards democratic governance and accountability on the part of state officials” (ibid: 26). In sum, the media in Africa is in the frontline of the struggle for democratization by, among other practices, providing a forum for dissenting voices, promoting democratic values and above all by serving as watchdog against authoritarianism. Furthermore, Ojo (2003: 831) contends that since the return to democracy, the Nigerian media have pursued what he calls a “relentless war against corruption in high places” (ibid: 833). Other researchers agree with this broad position, giving specific details and instances of how the Nigerian media has so far been active at uncovering and reporting cases of corruption in the country. Iwokwagh and Batta (2011: 327-328) hold that the media in Nigeria have been “extremely useful in the fight against corruption” through their investigations and news report of corrupt practices which have in turn lead to “resignations from public offices”. They cite three instances of such high-profile resignations from public office because media investigations and reports. The first of this involves a former speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, Salisu Buhari who, as the media

uncovered in a huge scandal in 1999, had forged degree certificates of the University of Toronto, Canada, which he never attended, while also falsifying his age at 36 years when in fact he was then 29 and therefore constitutionally unqualified to contest his seat in the first place. Another Speaker, Patricia Etteh and former Minister of Health Professor Adenike Grange were also forced to resign from government over financial scandals uncovered by the media in 2007 (Iwokwagh and Batta, 2011: 328). Similarly, several other researchers have documented many more recent examples where various Nigerian newspapers have presumably investigated and reported cases of corruption involving top politicians, military and police officers, senior officials of the civil service as well as senior executives in banking, pensions management, stocks exchange and other private sector businesses (Sowunmi et al, 2010: 13-16; Alikor et al, 2013: 47-49; Olaiya et al, 2013: 53). Indeed, for Olaiya et al (2013: 57) it was the Nigerian media that saved democracy from derailment by serving as the vanguard of constitutionalism in 2006 when the former President Olusegun Obasanjo attempted to have the constitution changed to enable him to rule beyond the constitutional limit of 8 years or two terms. Thus, the implication of all the above is that the Nigerian media has continued its long-established tradition of promoting probity and transparency in governance during this period of democratic experimentation by bravely investigating and exposing corrupt practices among top elites in the country.

Yet, this view of African media as champions of democracy is not shared by all. Hatchen (1971: 148-149) suggests that African press criticism of government during the colonial era merely follows the general pattern of British colonial policy, which encouraged colonial administrators throughout the Empire to exercise “restraint in their treatment of journalists and usually acted within the bounds of British common law” (in Shaw, 2009: 495). For Hatchen then, it is not

the African press that was an active watchdog by itself as such; rather, colonial administration was tolerant of the press based on established norms in British politics and society (*ibid*). Other studies hold that African media, particularly the newspapers, are as antidemocratic and elitist as the governments they claim to challenge. The idea is that since the media in Africa are generally based in cities and close to the seats of power, they mostly reflect the views of elites rather than the experiences of ordinary Africans (Traber, 1987; Domatob, 1991, cited in Kasoma, 1995: 541). Also, Musa (1997: 132) contends that watchdog journalism in Africa is often overshadowed by the practice of 'development journalism' in which journalists serve as "cheerleaders" of government in the name of supporting national development efforts, rather than critical agents who hold the government to account on behalf of the public (Bourgault, 1995: 173). Hall (2009) reasons that considering the poor circulation figures of newspapers, and even poorer literacy rates and purchasing power in the country, the press could not have had as much impact on the struggle for democracy as often claimed. Mercy Ette's (2000) content analysis shows that news coverage of previous democratic transitions in Nigeria reflected frames provided by the military. Politicians were presented as incompetent, unruly and incapable of leading the country, as against the military who were presented offering a more viable and better organized alternative. This is instructive considering that throughout successive military regimes, nearly all coups in Nigeria had been hailed by the press (Agbaje, 1993: 461). Furthermore, Obadare (1999: 38-39) has wondered why press opposition to government misdemeanour has not translated into "any moral perfection on the part of the press itself", since Nigerian newspapers are notorious for various forms of corruption. Finally, some scholars lament the ethnic and sectarian divisions in the press (Alozieuwa, 2012: 379; Jibo and Okoosi-Simbene, 2003, 180), which

are effectively anti-democratic tendencies. Moreover, Kasoma (1995: 547) notes that sometimes, what is claimed as investigative journalism may be a covert attempt by journalists or publishers to settle scores with some people in power; or a sensationalist drive to maximize profits (Berger, 2002: 38), or indeed, a case of using local media to promote foreign interests (Camara, 2008: 291). The consequence of these issues, Rønning (2009: 166) observes, is that “much of what is presented as investigative journalism in Africa is based on poorly sourced material, often only one source, which has not been properly checked”. Also, in their analysis of business reporting in Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda Behrman et al (2012: 87) find that stories are poorly sourced and written, biased, and the journalists themselves lack training and motivation. Hence, they conclude that “African media have a long way to go” before they could live up to the ideals of watchdog journalism as it is understood and practised in more established democracies (*ibid*: 96).

2.6 The research questions:

Three observations emerge from the foregoing discussion that serve as a basis for the present research. First, most of the researches on press freedom and watchdog journalism and corruption in Nigeria tend to be long on informed commentary and analysis but short on empirical evidence, itself an indication of the still emerging phase of political communication scholarship in Africa (Berger, 2002: 23). Where systematic evidence exists, it tends to be anecdotal or based largely on episodic analysis of a handful of celebrated cases of press reporting of corruption, which does not warrant some of the generalizations reached. For example, the same cases of exposure in the press and subsequent removal from office of two former Speakers of the federal House of Representatives, Senate

Presidents, Ministers or Governors for involvement in corruption tend to dominate scholarly analysis of watchdog journalism in the country (Alikor, 2013; Olaiya et al, 2013; Alozieuwa, 2012; Iwokwagh and Batta, 2011; Ojebode 2011; Sowunmi et al, 2010; Olukotun, 2004; Jibo and Okoosi-Simbene, 2003; Ojo, 2003). In this sense, some of the generalizations made may be farfetched or not supported empirically. Thus, analysis of a longer-term coverage of corruption, such as attempted here is more useful for generalizing on the subject. Secondly, most of the literature reviewed above tends to overlook how other actors like anti-corruption agencies may be contributing to news coverage of corruption in Nigeria. Indeed, as we shall see, most of the big cases of corruption such as the example mentioned by John Kerry above tend to come from official sources, rather than through independent initiative of journalistic investigations. In this sense, the practice of watchdog journalism in Nigeria and its role in the country's democratization and political accountability is inadequately accounted for in the literature. For example, studies by Olukotun (2004; 2002a; 2002b; 2000) have documented the extent to which the Nigerian press went to get news out for the public during the twilight years of the military by going 'underground' and engaging in 'guerrilla' journalism as a measure of its support for democracy. As Adebanwi (2011: 46) put it, African media have often been 'praised' for their role in demystifying sit-tight dictators or chasing the military back to the barracks and out of politics. This role of the African media is presented as part of a construction of binary opposites between the civil society and the state in Africa (Berger, 2002). Yet, such narratives often overlook the role played by elements within the state in providing news leaks or tips for safety to the media (Adebanwi, 2011). Thus, research requires providing a measurable performance of watchdog journalism in relation to corruption in Nigeria, and by implication Africa. Finally, and most significantly, studies of investigative reporting in Africa

and elsewhere in mainstream political communication research tend to overlook the nature, scale and forms which corruption itself takes in different societies. Indeed, corruption, in some sense, is the very object of investigative or watchdog journalism, yet corruption itself is hardly problematised within the political communication literature. But corruption occurs very differently across time and space, and in certain social contexts, such as Nigeria, corruption may indeed be a dominant feature of the political culture and would likely shape political reporting, including practices such as investigative journalism. Hence, such a problematization of corruption is necessary to fully measure and understand the media's political accountability role particularly in new democracies such as Nigeria. From the foregoing therefore, the central question of this study is: how does the specific contexts of politics and political culture, particularly the nature, form and scale of corruption in Nigeria influence the practice of investigative reporting in the country? This general question then breaks down to the following:

1. How and to what extent is corruption reported in the Nigerian press?
2. How do Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting and to what extent is there journalistic autonomy in relation to investigative reporting in the press?
3. To what extent is independent investigative reporting reflected in coverage of corruption in the Nigerian press?
4. How has the Freedom of Information Law (2011) impacted or contributed to investigative reporting of corruption in the Nigerian press?
5. How do the specific contexts of politics and culture in Nigeria influence news coverage of corruption in the press?

Chapter Three: Data Collection Processes and Procedures:

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter outlines the methodological processes and procedures followed in collecting data to answer the research questions for the study, and justifications for some of the decisions made during these processes. The next section provides an overview of the general framework for collecting data for this research, namely, a triangulation of three methods. These are quantitative content analysis of press coverage of corruption in four national newspapers over 12 years of news coverage, formal and informal interviews with journalists and editors, and newsroom observation of journalists at work in two of the four newspapers. This is followed by detailed explanation of the specific methods of the data collection and the connections between them. Next, I examine questions of validity and reliability, and a note on my personal and social location to the research, that is, reflexivity. The final section briefly describes how the data is analysed and presented in the empirical chapters, that is, chapters four through seven.

While investigative reporting is frequently discussed or implied in political communication studies, it is rarely the subject of empirical research (Lanosga et al, 2017: 284). However, scholars have asked, and answered through a variety of methods, certain questions about investigative reporters, or their reporting, or the wider media and political system in which it is practiced, or on occasions any combinations of these. Some researches collect survey or interview data from investigative reporters in a country, region or media to understand role perceptions or other professional assumptions or attitudes of investigative reporters (Lanosga et al, 2017; Lanosga and Houston, 2016; Berkowitz, 2007;

Waisbord, 2000). Other researchers look at how investigative reporters negotiate the changing political, economic and technological environments in the media systems of regions or countries, or conversely, the effects of investigative reporting on these systems (Larsen, 2016; Li and Sparks, 2016; Tong and Spark, 2009; Stetka and Örnebring, 2013; Tong, 2012; Yusha'u, 2010; Mudhai, 2007; Waisbord, 2000). For example, a study of investigative reporting in 12 Eastern European countries by Stetka and Örnebring (2012) was based on interviews with 18 investigative reporters and a 'small expert survey'. Other researches approach investigative reporting from its finished product, mainly through some form of content analysis of published investigative stories in newspapers or other media. Some of these studies analyse the narrative or discursive strategies of investigative reports to make various general statements about their moral claims (Waisbord, 1997b), or ideological leanings (Aucoin, 2007), or narrative strategies (Lockyer, 2006). For example, Ettema and Glasser (1998) combine interviews and close analysis of published investigative reports to approach the moral claims and narrative strategies of U.S investigative reporters. But other researchers make more quantitative content analysis of investigative reporting in years of news content, or combine these with surveys of or interviews with investigative reporters, to trace the historical or contemporary trajectories of investigative journalism or to identify the types, quantity or quality or impact of investigative stories published by various news media in respective countries (Lanosga and Martin, 2017; Lublinski et al, 2016; Lanosga, 2015a; 2014; Carson, 2014; Fink and Schudson, 2014; Starkman, 2014; Relly and Scwhalbe, 2013; Kovacic and Erjavec, 2011; Pinto, 2008; Nord, 2007; Ekstrom et al, 2006; Rolland, 2006). For example, Carson (2014) conducted a quantitative content analysis of a sample of elite Australian newspapers to determine the amount of investigative reporting published over forty years.

Others analyse award entries such as for the Pulitzer Prize in the U.S (Lanosga and Martin, 20017) to determine changing patterns of the entries over time. The foregoing is a snapshot of the sorts of questions, methods and findings from existing research on investigative journalism in different national or regional contexts, and therefore serves as a methodological background for my own research and the discussion that follows in this chapter.

As mentioned above, research on investigative reporting generally focus attention on the reporter or their media, the reporting itself as expressed in news content, or the wider political or socio-economic context in which investigative reporting is practiced. Taken together, my research questions cover all three. First the reporting: how much of overall coverage of corruption in Nigerian newspapers is the product of independent investigative reporting? Secondly, the reporter: how do Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting, and by implication how do they practice¹⁴ it? And finally, the wider context of investigative reporting: do the specific contexts of politics and culture and the regulatory environment in Nigeria influence investigative reporting of corruption? Therefore, to answer these questions, I analysed front page news coverage in a sample of 2, 920 newspapers from four national dailies¹⁵ over twelve years by randomly selecting every 6th edition in each publication from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2012. However, 174 combined editions (5.96% of total sample) were missing from the archives¹⁶, so the actual sample analysed

¹⁴ By practice here I mean journalists independently investigating and reporting corruption, a process that is manifested or expressed in published investigative stories of corruption. Practice, in this sense, also implies performance as evaluated by researchers or others. For example, Mellado (2015: 597) notes that “analysis of performance requires studying production processes or looking at news product as an outcome”.

¹⁵ *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, and *Thisday*.

¹⁶ I conducted this part of the research at the Centre for Historical Documentation, Kaduna, which is affiliated to Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. The centre has an archive of several Nigerian newspapers dating back many years, even decades, including now defunct newspapers. However, their working hours were not much helpful for me: the open at 9am and close at 4pm, but researchers must leave at 3pm to enable staff time to re-shelf the resources used, and a member of staff must be in the search room together with the researcher(s) to ensure people do not rip off pages or something like that. All these mean that the

was 2746 newspapers for all four publications. Overall, the sample represents two consecutive years of news coverage, out of the 12-year period covered by the analysis, for each publication. The unit of analysis is the complete news story on corruption¹⁷ reported on the front page. The corruption stories¹⁸ were then coded into one of nine content categories based on source attribution or type of corruption story to isolate what amount (percentage) of corruption stories were independently investigated by the newspapers. As I explain in detail below, coding decisions were informed by the research questions, two pilot studies and the nature of a corruption story itself. The content analysis is then supplemented with a total of 8 weeks of two newsroom observation in two of the dailies in Abuja (6 weeks) and Lagos (2 weeks), and in-depth interviews with 24 respondents, including investigative reporters, political reporters, editors, two members of staff of anticorruption agencies, and one official of an NGO promoting investigative journalism in Nigeria. The observation data did not prove to be much useful because, as it turned out, investigative reporting is 'fieldwork', most of which happens outside newsrooms and therefore could not be observed directly by the researcher. However, I observed the general organization of investigative reporting in the two newspapers and had some conversations with reporters, in addition to the formal interviews, and combined these with interviews for coding. Transcripts of the interviews and the conversations were coded thematically based on the research questions, the interview guidelines and the other relevant themes that emerged from my discussions with the respondents. I explain all these in detail below.

coding took nine months in total, 5 months (July-November) in 2014 and 4 months for recoding in 2015 and (July-September), and completed in January 2016.

¹⁷ Corruption is here operationally defined as financial misconduct involving (Nigerian) public officials or executives of corporate organizations, as detailed in chapter one above.

¹⁸ Corruption stories in this research are defined as complete (frontpage) news stories referencing corruption, often indicated by words like 'corruption', 'bribery', 'graft', 'embezzlement', 'mismanagement', 'loot', 'sleaze', etc, or their variants, in the headline or text of the story.

3.2 Triangulation and mixed methods research:

As the research deals with news content, journalists and the wider context of media organization and practice of investigative reporting in Nigeria, I adopt a triangulation of three methods: observation, in-depth interviews and quantitative content analysis of coverage of corruption in Nigerian newspapers. Mixed-methods researches are becoming increasingly popular in social research in general, and particularly in media and communications research (Treadwell, 2014: 14; Berg, 2009: 5-6; Bryman, 2008: 379). One reason for this increasing popularity of mixed-method research is that most questions that face communication researchers are better approached methodologically by combining different research techniques and procedures for data collection (Deacon et al, 2007: 3). Another reason is that findings from each method can be compared with those of others, which improves the reliability of overall data collected (Berger, 2011: 25; Hansen et al, 1998: 44-45). In this sense, data from each technique complements findings from the other techniques used in the research. Third, some techniques lend themselves more suitable to certain kinds of questions than others. Berger (2011: 3) notes that communication researchers generally focus on one or more aspects of the communication process such as sources, messages/contents, channels/media, audiences, feedback, etc. This means that techniques for studying audiences may not be well suited for studying media content. By this reasoning, research that focuses on two or more aspects of the communication process may combine two or more techniques of data collection. That is why triangulation of three techniques is useful for me here. I study messages (coverage of corruption) through quantitative content analysis, but also engage with the journalists (producers) and their media through observation and semi-structured interviews. One justification for this approach is that some of my research

questions are better explored through certain methods than others, and for some questions even a combination of two techniques. For example, Research Questions 1, 3 and 4 (RQ1, R3 and RQ4) together relate to coverage of corruption in the press over time, including news reports of corruption independently investigated and reported by the newspapers. I approach these questions through quantitative content analysis of coverage of corruption in the four sampled publications and complemented with close engagement with the journalists themselves through indepth interviews and some of my own independent observation of their work. Two reasons informed this decision. First, media production is inevitably reflected in media content, a quantitative analysis of which can throw up various trends and patterns that illuminate, by inference at least, the phenomenon under investigation (Bryman, 2016: 287; Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2015: 208; Deacon et al, 2007: 117-118; Hansen et al, 1998: 92). In this case, the phenomenon is independent investigative reporting of corruption in the Nigerian press. And the content analysis was designed not only to measure coverage of corruption, but also to specify what amount of coverage comes from independent media investigations. Secondly however, inferences from quantitative analysis of media coverage, while generalizable, still may not say everything about media contents or reflect their full complexity. Specifically, content analysis does not say why coverage of a topic, corruption for example, is the way it is in a sample of newspapers, and hence it is typically supplemented by more “interpretive procedures” (Gunter, 2012: 248). Moreover, McQuail (2005: 277) notes that interviews are a useful means of generating data from “involved informants” who have some detailed and experiential understanding about a given subject. For research on investigative reporting, therefore, the interviews and newsroom observation were intended to provide an insider perspective and other details about investigative reporting

and coverage of corruption in Nigerian newspapers that may otherwise not be readily evident in the coded sample.

Qualitative or textual content analysis is itself appealing for research that deals with coverage of corruption or any other topic in the news (Deacon et al, 2007: 138-140) and we have seen in the brief methodology review above. But qualitative content analysis, such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), in general, emphasises 'close' scrutiny of 'latent' or hidden meanings of texts, rather than manifest content (Hansen et al, 1998: 100). This makes such techniques unsuitable for my research which aims for simple frequency count of the occurrence of corruption stories in Nigerian newspapers to account for extent of reporting, rather than the latent or hidden meanings of the stories. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis techniques are based largely on the subjective interpretations of the researcher, itself considerably determined by the researcher's location in the social world, and thus constraining both reliability and generalizability (Hansen, et al, 1998: 131; Treadwell, 2014: 234). For this reason, qualitative content analysis is often more suitable for small samples dealing with representation of ideas, people or ideologies in media texts (Deacon et al, 2007) which is not the purpose of this research. Additionally, textual analysis methods make identifying long-term trends and patterns of coverage over time both cumbersome and problematic, since the sample is normally few and the analysis is based on subjective interpretations of the researcher. In other words, since the present research seeks to understand the extent of independent investigative journalism in the Nigerian press as *manifested* in media coverage of corruption over the period of democratization since 1999, the choice of quantitative content analysis seems more suitable and therefore adopted here. I also considered structured questionnaires or focus groups. However, I regarded them less suitable than in-depth interviews which

have the advantage of snowballing to help connect the researcher to other respondents, and informal conversations with journalists and editors which observation allows. Focus group discussion with journalists would not be convenient for them, due to the nature of their work, while questionnaires may have poor return rates for the same reason.

3.3 Data Collection Phase I: Content Analysis:

Content analysis has a long history and pedigree and remains one of the most widely used methods in researching communications media (Berger, 2011: 205). It is used to identify and count the frequency of occurrence of certain features of media texts which in turn enables researchers to make meaningful general comments about these texts and their wider significance to society (Hansen et al, 1998: 95). Indeed, as Berelson (1952) famously argues, content analysis research “reflects cultural patterns of groups, institutions or societies; reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional and societal attention; and describes trends in communication content” (in Weber, 1990: 12). All these three uses of content analysis are directly relevant to the present effort. First, analysis of coverage of corruption in the press over a reasonable period would help to reveal the trends, patterns and extent of attention given to the issue of corruption by the press, and thus provide data for answering parts of research questions 1, 2, and 3. By implication, the data collected through the analysis could say something about the democratic watchdog performance of the press in the country in a way that re-examines and problematizes dominant sections of existing literature about press and politics in Nigeria, and by extension Africa. A second advantage for the use of content analysis in this research is that the method is systematic, involves quantification, and therefore useful for mapping long term trends of media coverage and hence enables meaningful generalizations (Deacon et al, 2007). Furthermore, such analysis will

complement data collected from the other techniques of observation and intensive interviews as proposed above, and therefore useful for making a fuller sense of the practice of investigative journalism in the Nigerian press. For example, Hansen et al (1998: 94) note that "several classic studies of news production combine observational methods (in news organizations) and interviews (with media professional and sources) with content analysis of the 'product': the news". This is one additional reason that I find triangulation of content analysis, interviews and newsroom observation useful, since together, they help to answer the research questions.

(a) Sampling procedure: media, content and period selected:

Sampling in content analysis generally follows a three-step selection procedure. This involves decisions about what kinds of media to select, that is whether broadcast, print or online, for analysis and what specific titles, period and relevant content covered in the analysis (Deacon et al, 2007: 120; Hansen et al, 1998: 100). I follow this general process in the specific ways described below.

Sampling the media: As described in previous chapters above, the Nigerian media universe is a complex mix of print, broadcast and online media, a variety of private and government ownership, and regional spread across the country. For this research, only private newspapers were considered, which rules out broadcast and online media, all government owned media and magazines. First, Nigerian newspapers are mostly privately owned, and therefore tend to be freer than broadcast media which, to date, are largely controlled by government. Secondly, several scholars claim that Nigerian newspapers are overwhelmingly political in tone and reportage (Olukotun, 2000: 33); agitational and adversarial (Agbaje, 1993: 459); and have espoused watchdog journalism ideals since colonial times (Oso, 2013: 17). Other scholars note that newspapers have

reported several cases of corruption (Ojo, 2003: 832); and played crucial roles in promoting democracy and accountability in the country (Olaiya et al, 2013: 51; Ojo, 2007: 549). Such scholarly observations suggest a print media sector that are active in investigative reporting and coverage of corruption. For example, Dare (2011: 11-12), himself a former editor, claims that newspapers are the “backbone of Nigerian media”, first because they enjoy considerable freedom and also because they have been active in watchdog journalism practice. Also, Lanosga and Martin (2017: 8) find that newspapers account for more than half of 757 investigative stories submitted to the U.S Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) prize entries from 1976 to 2012. This indicates that newspapers tend to do more investigative reporting than other media. Hence, newspapers are considered for the research, but not magazines, mainly for convenience of coding, magazines are not included. Among the leading online media in Nigeria are *Sahara Reporters*, established in (2006) based in New York, *Premium Times* (2011), based in Abuja, and the *Nigerian Village Square* (2003) which has no identifiable location. Regardless of location however, these are largely diaspora citizen-based media. They are very popular among Nigerians on social media and active in investigative journalism and reporting of corruption, particularly for *Sahara Reporters* and *Premium Times* in recent years (Dare, 2011). However, their impact on the political system remains ambiguous, since they are hardly taken seriously by the political and business elite in the country, although this is changing gradually. Therefore, online media are not also considered for this research, although it will certainly be interesting further research to have a comparative analysis of coverage of corruption between the traditional print media and the newer citizen-based online outlets. Finally, as noted previously, most broadcast media are still owned by government at federal, state and local levels. Journalists in these media are essentially part of the government

bureaucracy as civil servants, with little or no journalistic freedom (Ciboh, 2007; Hasty, 2005a; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Therefore, one expects little practice of investigative journalism or coverage of corruption from broadcast media. My focus on newspapers for analysis of investigative journalism and coverage of corruption in Nigeria has precedence in several similar existing studies (Dincer and Johnston, 2016; Fink and Schudson, 2014; Pinto, 2008; Ekström et al 2006; Lockyer, 2006), although broadcast and online media are also used, or sometimes a combination of both. For example, in her content analysis of changing patterns of investigative journalism in Argentina, Pinto (2008: 757) focused on three newspapers because she believed newspapers there are influential in agenda-setting for other media, and that investigative reporting had in fact evolved in the print press.

In sum then, four newspapers (*The Guardian*, *Punch*, *Thisday* and *Daily Trust*) are purposively selected because they are adequately representative of the top national dailies in terms of popularity and circulation (Olukotun, 2004:72). Three of these publications, *The Guardian*, *Punch*, and *Thisday* are in Lagos, the commercial, industrial and formerly political capital of Nigeria, while *Daily Trust* is in Abuja, the present seat of the federal government. This selection also accounts for the regional variations in the ownership and location of private print media in the country. Sampling at this level is purposive because there is no available and reliable data about the total number of publications in Nigeria, perhaps because of the very rapid rate of entry and exit of newspapers in the media market.

Time Frame: The time covered by this analysis is also purposively selected to cover a period of 12 years from 01 January 2001 to 31 December 2012, to reflect the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria, as discussed in the preceding chapters above. Several reasons inform this choice. First, analysis of twelve-year

coverage could provide a broader view about the watchdog performance of the media under democratization, which is one of the specific objectives of this study. Secondly, data taken from coverage over 12 years is long enough to make meaningful generalizations possible. As pointed out above, previous research on coverage of corruption in the Nigerian media tends to be based on a few months or years, making their generalizations problematic. Third, this period also coincides with the beginning and consolidation of rapid media development in the country, including the enactment of the Freedom of Information Law. The point about freedom of legislation is particularly important, as it will enable the researcher to test, empirically, the assumption that formal legislations could change the character of media behaviour in developing democracies such as Nigeria. Finally, the longitudinal element in the sampling directly addresses the question of the influence certain aspects of politics and culture may have on investigative journalism and coverage of corruption in the media, since patterns or trends influenced by political culture are better observed over long periods.

(b) Selecting relevant content:

Since daily newspapers are dated, and the number of days in a year is fixed (365 or 366 once in four years), the total population of editions published by a newspaper in 12 years (our research period) is readily determined and transformed into a sampling frame. Bryman (2016: 174) notes that a sampling frame is the “list of all units in the population from which the sample will be selected”. For this, work, then, the unit is daily edition of the newspaper published by the four publications and the population is all the daily editions over the 12-year period from 2001 to 2012. Thus, in sampling the newspapers to analyse, I follow the basic procedure of simple random sampling (Bryman, 2016: 176-177). I first develop a complete sampling frame from all the editions published by each of the four titles from 1st January 2001 to 31st December

2012, by assigning consecutive numbers 1, 2, 3, ... 4380 to each daily edition. This gives a total of 4380 editions for each publication, or 17520 for the combined four titles¹⁹. Lacy et al (2001: 837-838) estimate that for content analysis of daily newspapers, a population of six months of coverage requires about one month (28 days) of sample when using simple random sampling. Following this, 12 years of coverage will require 24 months or two years of sample size, which, gives 730 editions for each publication or 2920 for the four publications combined ($730 \times 4 = 2920$). Therefore, deciding for a sample size of 730 editions, I draw a random sample from this numbered frame by an interval of 6, that is by selecting every 6th edition in the complete frame, starting from 1 (January 1, 2001) in each publication²⁰. This gives a minimum of 5 and maximum of 6 editions in a 30-day month, or at least 1 edition selected per week in the entire period. In my view, this makes the sample large enough to be representative of the overall population, and sufficiently adequate to enable observation of patterns and trends of coverage.

3.4 Unit of analysis, content categories and coding scheme/procedure:

(a) Unit of analysis:

This content analysis is designed to measure how and the extent to which corruption is reported in the newspapers selected for analysis, to determine what amount of overall coverage of corruption results from independent investigative journalism, and to find out whether FOI legislation increased the

¹⁹ I peg a year at 365 days or daily editions and multiply this by 12 for each publication to cover the 12-year period of the research, and then multiply by 4, that is, the four publications ($365 \times 12 = 4380 \times 4 = 17520$). However, this means that 3 editions arising from an additional day in February from three leap years within this period (2004, 2008, and 2012) are not included in the sampling frame because their removal would not have any impacts on the sample selected or data collected, but also for the sake of convenience in constructing the frame.

²⁰ The interval, 6, is arrived at by a simple random sampling fraction of dividing the sampling population by sample size ($4380/730 = 6$), that is, one every 6 editions is selected in the sample.

amount of investigation and reporting of corruption in Nigerian newspapers. The crucial question is how to differentiate between all three, for example, how to differentiate an investigative story of corruption from other stories of corruption, and how to determine the impact of FOI legislation on coverage of corruption over the research period. I answer these questions through a three-step coding procedure and designed the coding sheet accordingly to reflect these procedures.

First, the unit of analysis is the complete corruption story on the front page. In practical application, this means a frontpage news story which references corruption or financial misconduct by public officials or executives of private companies, such as contract inflation by a director in a ministry or shares manipulation by an executive of a company or bank, all for personal gain. That is, we focus on a narrower definition of corruption: that which involves personal financial or monetary gain at the expense of the public interest, as Johnston (2005) defines it and adopted here²¹. Iwokwagh and Batta (2011: 331-332) capture the way the term is commonly understood in Nigeria as “all manifestations of financial impropriety. This includes actions such as bribery, over-invoicing, phoney contracts, diversion of public funds, and other indicators of financial corruption” involving officials of government or top managers in the private sector. That is, the form of corruption that involves tinkering with public funds by public officials for private gain or by top executives in the private sector in ways that breach the rules. Two pilot studies show that this form of corruption tends to be most emphasized in the media and is often indicated by certain referents in the headline or body of the story in Nigerian newspapers. Such referents include ‘corruption’, ‘bribery’ ‘graft’, ‘fraud’, ‘scam’ ‘scandal’

²¹ See section 1.3 on corruption in chapter.

‘embezzlement’, ‘misappropriation’, ‘investigation’, ‘probe’, and their different variants such as ‘corrupt’, ‘bribe’, ‘fraudulent’, or compounds such as ‘probe-panel’, etc. Both the pilot studies and the main analysis bear this out. Thus, I identify corruption stories by reading through all the stories on the front page of a given sample, including their continuation in the inside pages, and code those stories that contain the above or similar terms²². Also, a story is coded as a corruption story where the overall story makes clear or implies some wrongdoing by officials in government or private sector involving various sums of money in any currency, typically in naira, dollars, pounds and euros. Therefore, forms of ‘corruption’ such as vote buying, election rigging, political thuggery, nepotism, sex for jobs or grades, human rights abuses and so on are not coded, except where the story makes explicitly clear, for example, that election officials abused their position in exchange for their own personal monetary or financial gain. In one story for instance, Chris Uba, a candidate defeated in a gubernatorial election in Anambra State alleged in a Higher Court testimony that then Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Maurice Iwu received a bribe of £536,000 to turn the election in his opponent’s favour. The story was primary about the election litigation, but was coded as a corruption story (*Daily Trust*, 11 November 2007). Similarly, all other kinds of financial crimes that do not involve public officials or executives of private companies, such as internet fraud, advance fee fraud and other kinds of scams known in Nigeria generally as ‘419’, for example Nigerians defrauding other Nigerians or nationals of other countries, were also not considered. In his book on corruption in Nigeria, Smith (2007: 28) considers such scams as probably the most “potent international symbol of Nigerian corruption” which should be understood as a “mode of interpretation” by ordinary Nigerians in

²² See coding manual in the appendix for details.

response to pervasive official corruption in the country. But I regard stories of such activities as instances of crime in general, rather corruption in the sense defined here, since these crimes are mostly perpetrated by citizens, rather than public officials or business executives. However, there were at least two cases of such 419 stories which were coded as corruption stories because they also involved public officials. One case is about two Indians known in the Nigerian press as Vaswami Brothers who connived with government officials to defraud the Nigerian government over privatization of some steel companies. The other involved officials of the national oil company who colluded with Nigerian fraudsters to defraud a Brazilian businessman. Each of these cases appeared a few times in the sample and were coded accordingly. All the details above are important because 'corruption' is so broad a term and so central to media output in Nigeria that a specific definition of it is necessary to make coding practicable and meaningful.

In addition, only news stories on the front page of a sample were coded. Therefore, opinion articles, editorials, pictures, adverts, and all other content types are not considered. Similarly, corruption stories that are not headlined or promoted on the front pages were not coded. However, in most cases, front page stories continue into the inner pages, so the researcher follows every story on the front page of every sampled edition to wherever it is completed in the inner pages. There are several justifications for the focus on front page. First, the location of a story in any given edition of a newspaper is an indication of the prominence or importance attached to the story by the publication: front-page stories are regarded as most important. This is well established in agenda-setting studies. Thus, the expectation is that investigative reports of official corruption would be an important item in the media agenda and therefore given front page prominence. This assumption proved sensible as during my

interviews with journalists, several of them mentioned the importance of the front page to make various points. One editor for example said about investigative reports that they do at his paper, that "... our second story, sometimes depending on the strength of the story, what we do is we either lead or make it second just to give it more prominence or more space to breath".²³ Second, the focus on only front page news stories makes the research manageable since the sample is large, involving 2920 editions over twelve years. Finally, analysing front page stories only is also indirectly an analysis of the inside pages in the edition: if fewer stories of corruption appear on the front page, then it may indicate that corruption is given low prominence in the media, or vice versa. Either case would be an important empirical finding in its own right; it is not even necessary to analyse stories in the inside pages.

(b) Content categories:

The preceding section describes the first step of the coding process: identifying corruption stories by reading all news stories reported on the front page of a given sampled edition, and deciding, based on criteria explained above, which of the stories are corruption stories, that is, the unit of analysis. In the second step, all corruption stories identified are then coded into one of nine categories based on *source attribution* and *type of corruption story*. The interactions and power relations between journalists and news sources, that is, providers of information, are central to political communication research. Such interactions influence the everyday thoughts about politics and political behavior of politicians (Davis, 2009); influence news agenda and frames and by implication the distribution of power (Entman, 2007); and help determine what can be said in news and who gets to say it (Broersma et al 2013). Furthermore, the diversity

²³ Interview with Editor-in-Chief, *Daily Trust*, Abuja, Nigeria, November 2015.

of sources referenced in news stories is an indication of the democratic performance of the media, since it shapes the extent to which citizens have effective voice or power to participate in the political process (Hansen, 1991). However, a strand of research on journalist-source relations focuses on the specific matter of source attribution, that is, the practice of referencing a story to information sources, as an important element of news production processes, particularly news writing. Broersma et al (2013: 388) contend that news “sourcing is a central and defining element in journalism” practice, which shapes journalistic norms like autonomy and independence, everyday production practices like checking and verifying facts, and properties of news texts like attribution. For Sundar (1998: 56-56) source attribution is the “backbone” of a news story and “the bread and butter” of journalism practice, such that a news story is “rarely, if ever, published if it is not properly attributed to a legitimate source”. Attribution of sources in a news story enhances the credibility of the story and differentiates it from an opinion article.

But while the concept of source can mean different things in journalism scholarship, from media channels and technologies to journalists themselves, in a news story, ‘source’ simply refers to the “information providers quoted within news stories” (Sundar, 1998: 56). Sources of information for news stories could be individuals, institutions, documents or reports and so on (Fink and Schudson, 2014: 11; Sundar, 1998: 56; Hansen, 1991: 477). In content analysis research, coding is often based on news source referenced in a story, named or unnamed. For example, Justin, Williams and Franklin (2008a) analyse news sources from news reports drawn from a varied mix of print and broadcast media in the UK over a two-week period, to determine the influence of public relations and news agencies on British journalism. Similarly, Ericson et al (1991) analysed media representation of crime, law and justice by coding news sources into several

categories, including ‘journalists themselves’, ‘government sources’, ‘private sector sources’, ‘individuals’, and ‘unspecified’ sources, etc (cited in Hansen et al, 1998: 199). For content analysis of investigative reporting, coding sources has been particularly important in distinguishing investigative reports from other kinds of news reports in media content. For example, Kathleen Hansen (1991) analysed 60 “enterprise” stories (including investigative reports) submitted for Pulitzer Prizes and Investigative Reporters and Editors Conference in the U.S. She coded the stories based on source attribution and affiliation, that is the sources referenced and the institutions to which they are affiliated and compared here findings to existing research (ibid: 476). She finds that enterprise stories are more likely to refer to information sources, “both people and documents”, outside of government circles or “information sources with no identifiable affiliation” than daily news content. Only 4 in 10 sources are affiliated to government in enterprise stories, as against 8 in 10 for daily news content. Pinto (2008: 756) uses two criteria in her qualitative analysis of investigative reporting in three Argentinian newspapers: “autonomy, or the degree to which news organizations were free to critically cover powerful actors and assertiveness, or the ability of the newsroom to seek out multiple sources of information and report on topics of their choosing”. Fink and Schudson (2014) coded source attribution to distinguish four different types of news stories, including investigative stories in which the reporter plays the watchdog function by “investigating corruption or coming to the aid of a person who has been treated unjustly” (ibid: 11). Thus, in coding such investigative stories, they note that “reporters often call attention” to methods of reporting “in the ways they attribute their sources: ‘according to documents obtained by [news organization]’. For the purposes of our coding, articles that referenced efforts like these – obtaining non-public documents or conducting many or lengthy

interviews – were considered to be investigative” (ibid). Finally, Relly and Schwalbe (2013) coded news stories associated with corruption and with reference to freedom of information requests in three Indian newspapers.

The studies cited above have several implications for the design of my analysis. They show that source attribution is helpful in identifying investigative stories, that investigative stories involve some journalistic assertiveness in sourcing information, and the techniques journalists use in demonstrating this in news stories. For this research therefore, corruption stories are coded into one of nine categories depending on source attribution or type of corruption story coded. The two pilot studies, which I explain in detail below, show that corruption stories in Nigerian newspapers are attributed to a variety of sources, including anti-corruption agencies, investigative committees of the federal parliament or state assembly, adhoc commissions of inquiry by the federal or state government, ministry or agency, or to foreign media, or to police or the courts, or yet to individual politicians, civil society organizations, or citizens and documents. These sources make up seven of the nine categories into which corruption stories were coded, and explain one aspect of the coding process, that is, coding by source attribution. It is in this coding process that investigative stories of corruption are distinguished from other corruption stories, that is, through the sources attributed in the stories. For example, if a story of corruption is attributed to any of the anti-corruption agencies or probe panels set up by government, or parliamentary investigations of corruption by either the Senate or the House of Representatives, etc, then the story is considered an instance of routine beat reporting of corruption, rather than of investigative reporting. That is, the journalist reporting the story did not investigate the instance of corruption herself, rather, she merely reports it in the same way she would report a story from a news release, official briefing or press conference.

If on the other hand the story is attributed to the reporter's own independent sources, named or anonymous, then it is considered an instance of investigative reporting of corruption and a mark of the media's independent accountability role²⁴. In other words, corruption news in the press can be the result of either routine news reporting or of investigative reporting, the two forms of reporting being decidedly different, although both are examples of watchdog journalism broadly defined²⁵.

Furthermore, it highlights and accounts for the role of other actors in the political system earlier identified as being responsible for much of stories of corruption in the press. the categories for coding by source attribution are therefore seven: Independent media investigations (IMI); Anti-corruption Agencies (ACA); National and State Assemblies (NA); Commissions of Inquiry (COI); Foreign Media (FM); Diaspora or online media (DOM); and 'Other'. Corruption stories that are independently investigated, that is, investigative stories, were coded into the IMI category. These stories were normally attributed to the journalists' own independent sources, sometimes named, sometimes anonymous, using techniques such as "investigations by our reporter", "according to our findings", or "according to sources", or "documents obtained by our reporter", or "checks by *Daily Trust*", or "Punch investigations show that...", etc. Stories that were attributed to any of the three anticorruption agencies (EFCC, ICPC, and CCBT²⁶) were coded into the ACA category. Those

²⁴ As discussed in chapter two above, media coverage of corruption through routine processes such as coverage of parliamentary investigations or investigations by anti-corruption agencies or criminal proceedings of corruption cases in court are still regarded as examples of watchdog journalism by some researchers (Mellado, 2015; Coronel, 2010), they are not examples of investigative reporting which requires independent journalistic initiative. I discuss the complexities of such definitions in the specific case of Nigeria in subsequent chapters.

²⁵ See also Section 2.2 in Chapter Two above on conceptualizing watchdog journalism and investigative reporting.

²⁶ Nigeria's main anti-corruption agencies. Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); Independent Corruption and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC); Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal (CCBT). As we shall see, there are several others.

attributed to investigations by either chamber of the federal parliament (Senate and House of Representatives) or by any of the 36 state parliaments were coded into the NA category. Corruption stories generated by probe panels, commissions of inquiry, administrative panels set up various governments (mainly federal and state governments) were coded into the COI category. Stories from foreign media or diaspora or online media were coded accordingly into the Foreign Media (FM) and Diaspora/Online Media (DOM) categories. Corruption stories from any other sources such as the police, courts, whistleblowers, foreign governments, rather than foreign media (for example, some of the stories involving corruption by Nigerian officials were attributed to Scotland Yard, or Crown Courts, separate from those attributed to say the New York Times or BBC) were coded into the 'Other' category. In addition, all corruption stories coded into any of these seven categories are *corruption scandals*, that is, stories of corruption in which the alleged wrongdoing is specified, or the individual officials named, or public institutions to which the case is associated mentioned, and often the amounts or sums of money or other property involved in the case is specified, or any combination of these criteria. John Kerry's example of \$6 billion fraud in the national security case is a scandal in that the persons are in fact named in the stories, as is their affiliations and the sums of money involved. However, when then Prime Minister David Cameron said in May 2016 that Nigeria is one of two fantastically corrupt countries in the world, a statement that generated lots of stories in the Nigerian press, he did not specify that anyone had acted corruptly in any specific instance as in the sense of Kerry above. Such general statements about corruption in Nigeria are still corruption stories. But they are here coded under 'narrative of corruption' category or corruption talk. In practice, scandal stories are in fact easy to identify. Perhaps because of the element of sensationalism, Nigerian

newspapers generally indicate the names, institutions, amounts and specific wrongdoing alleged even in the headline of corruption stories, hence the use of different referents like 'graft', 'bribery', 'scandal', 'scam', 'embezzle', etc. as naming names and mentioning sums and institutions and mentioned wrongdoing clearly mention specific instances of alleged or real corruption by specific persons, groups or institutions, often involving specific sums of money or other public property. I refer to these as corruption scandals because a corruption scandal is the revelation of corruption in the media ((Tumber and Waisbord, 2004b: 1143). In these stories, the specific forms of wrongdoing are clearly mentioned, and the officials and sums involved are also named in the stories.

Two further types of corruption stories were encountered in the sampled newspapers however. A single corruption scandal can generate several stories over many days or even weeks in the same newspaper. By their nature, corruption scandals tend to have a relatively long 'page-life' in the news, from the initial breaking story of the scandal to subsequent developments in the case such as prosecution, trial and conviction in court. Reporters tend to follow these developments to keep the scandal in the media agenda. For this reason, corruption scandals are often called 'media frenzies', but it is also how investigative reporting or revelations of corruption result in reforms (Tumber and Howard, 2004a; Esser and Hartung, 2004). Indeed, investigative stories of corruption or other breaches are often presented in series, that is, in parts over several days or even weeks after the initial breaking news. One example is the recent Panama Papers case in the world media. In sum, corruption scandals often generate follow-up stories of the same scandal. But to give a more specified example, on 23rd January 2005, *The Punch* reported a story that EFCC was investigating then Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun for corruption

totalling over 1 billion naira. The story was attributed to the EFCC and presented as lead story, that is, with the boldest headline on the front page. It was also the first time this case would appear in the sample. But then again on 12th March 2005, (about six weeks after the first story), *The Punch* reported another story on the same case and the same person, reflecting additional charges of corruption. And then on 30th March 2005, *The Punch* reported a third story on the same case, this time that the IGP has been arrested. On 5th April 2005, another story on the same case that the IGP was refused bail in court. And yet another story on 23rd April that a former Inspector General of Police Mohammed Dikko Yusuf had refused to stand surety for the 'embattled'²⁷ IGP. Thus, we have six different corruption stories on the same case. Indeed, stories on this case continued until the IGP was released from prison after serving a brief term. In this research, I coded the first story as a corruption scandal in the ACA category, but all subsequent stories were coded into the Follow-Up (FS) category, and there were, in fact, several similar cases, which explains why the FS category contains the largest number of corruption stories. And then, there is the 'narrative of corruption story' which is a corruption story but does not involve any specific wrongdoing by anyone. For example, on 23 March 2004, *Thisday* reported the then Minister of State for Finance, Mrs Esther Usman to have said that about 30% of corruption in Nigeria can be traced to the Nigeria Customs Service. In another example, President Olusegun Obasanjo was reported to have asked Transparency International to expose Western companies that offer bribes to Nigerian officials (*Daily Trust*, 23 March 2005). Both stories are *news about corruption* in the press; but clearly, they do not involve any specific instance of wrongdoing in the same sense as the previous examples above. In this sense, the source of the story is not important to coding, since no specific

²⁷ This word is in fact a common referent in reporting corruption in Nigerian newspapers.

cases of corruption is involved. Hence, such stories were coded in the Narrative of Corruption (NC) category. In the third and final step of the coding process, stories were coded based on simple frequency counts, with each corruption story representing a numeric unit from 0 (no occurrence of corruption story on front page), 1 (one corruption story on front page of a sample), 2 (two corruption stories), etc. As we shall see in the next chapter, slightly over 9% of the sample carried two or more corruption stories, the maximum being five different corruption stories on the same front page of sampled newspaper in *The Punch*. Additionally, stories were also coded A if they were reported as lead story, or B, if they were not, as a further measure of prominence given to corruption stories in the newspapers.

(c) Borderline Stories:

A final point about the coding procedure requires clarification however. Based on the criteria described above, coding was quite straightforward for the bulk of the stories. The coding process itself was time-consuming and laborious, as with all content analysis research, but especially since the researcher had to read through an average of 6 stories per front page to identify any corruption stories reported. However, the way Nigerian newspapers write corruption stories make the task of the researcher easier. Several identifiers or referents such as words relating to corruption are generally indicated in the headline or body of the stories. Also, the newspapers tend to announce their own independent investigations with a rider or kicker, mostly the term 'investigation'. In addition, names of established sources like anti-corruption agencies, parliamentary committees, commissions of inquiries, foreign media or several other sources of the stories are attributed in the headline or the first paragraph, or both. Thus, names like EFCC, ICPC, CCBT, Senate, House, Adhoc Committee, etc are quite common in the headline of the stories coded. Furthermore, names of the public

officials, institutions or prominent people involved in the corruption cases also generally form part of the headline and lead. All these make the analysis straightforward. Still, there were borderline stories that proved quite challenging for coding. Broadly, these are of three types. In some cases, it was difficult to decide whether the story is a corruption story, or not. One example is the story of a sitting president doing a public fundraiser for his presidential library in which he raised N6 billion (about \$16 million in today's exchange rates). No laws were breached, but it was still denounced and framed as "executive extortion" (*The Punch*, 17 May 2005) in the news. Secondly, some "pretend" to be investigative stories, but were not. For example, a story of delay in the Lagos light rail as reported in *The Punch* (12 November 2010). Another example is of a story in N3.5 billion (about \$10 million today) raised by then ruling Peoples' Democratic Party by selling nomination forms to candidates for various elective offices in an election year, (*The Punch*, 25 September 2010). But this is in fact a legitimate means of funding for political parties in Nigeria and is recognised in the electoral law and the forms are normally advertised openly. Indeed, samples from all four publications had at least one story of this kind all about the "Jumbo" pay for legislators, that is, in Nigerian parlance, the high pay for politicians in the country, especially federal lawmakers. But while in a country like Nigeria, such high pay for lawmakers offend public sensitivity, they are captured in law or extant regulations, and in many cases, not even by the legislators themselves, but by a supposedly independent commission which sets salaries of public officers, including those of legislators. Finally, some of the stories were about corruption and reported in the front page of the sampled newspapers, but they are of corruption in other countries, such the case of a former Israeli Prime Minister, Jacob Zuma of South Africa, etc. In sum, such borderline stories were either not coded at all or coded in the other category,

based on my subjective judgment at the time, as we shall see in chapter five, 19 of such stories in total were coded in the ‘Other’ category.

3.5 Data Collection Phase II: In-depth interviews and newsroom observation:

Stokes (2013: 92) notes that intensive interviews are widely used in media studies to collect data “on ideas, opinions and attitudes about certain practices” of media workers or processes of media work. The number of interviews held for a given research depends on the questions at hand or the availability and access to informants. Stetka and Örnebring (2013), for example, conducted 270 interviews during their research on investigative journalism in the new democracies of eastern and central Europe. Similarly, Tong (2012) did over 100 interviews (formal and informal) with reporters during her research on investigative journalism in China. Yusha’u (2010; 2009) did about 22 interviews while researching investigative journalism in Nigeria. Kaplan (2008) did 10 interviews to complement a survey of 281 print journalists in his study of the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of U.S investigative reporters. Participant observation, on the other hand, places the research at the centre of what is being studied, often requiring immersion of the researcher into the social setting or phenomena being studied. It’s an approach that involves, even requires, the researcher to have access to the social behaviour being studied. Data is then collected through field notes, conversations with involved actors, formal and informal interviews, analysis of documents etc (Bryman, 2016: 422; Treadwell, 2014: 192; Stokes, 2013: 105; Berg, 2009: 191-193; Deacon et al, 2007: 250-258; Hansen et al, 1998: 36). This makes the approach suitable for studying “social phenomena that are not easily studied by quantification or that are quite simply best observed in their actuality” (Deacon et al, 2007: 257). Finally, participant observation enables researchers to verify the professed

claims of social actors in various settings, that is, to determine what social actors actually do, as opposed to what they claim to be doing or to relate findings to theoretical literature (Stokes, 2013: 105). The method has been particularly useful for studies of news production processes and practices in relation to assumptions about journalistic objectivity, media ideologies such as watchdog journalism, news routines and so on (Hansen et al, 1998). Although media ethnography is scant in Africa, it's been used to explore political journalism in Ghana (Hasty, 2005a; 2005b), Nigerian broadcasting (Golding and Elliot, 1979), Nigerian audience consumption of Indian films (Larkin, 1997), censorship in the Nigerian film industry (McCain, 2013), influence of oral culture on African journalism (Bourgault, 1995), and relationships between alternative media and traditional newspapers in Nigeria (Akinfemisoye, 2013).

But newsroom observation is rarely used for studying investigative journalism and reporting of corruption. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter above, interviews, content analysis (both qualitative and quantitative), surveys or traditional historical method tend to be the predominant methods for researching investigative journalism. Still, a few studies collected data from investigative reporters by observing them at work, although in combination with other techniques (Tong, 2012; Hasty, 2005a; Waisbord, 2000). As Tong (2012: 7) remarks, "if we want an in-depth understanding of how investigative journalists do their work, it is necessary to go to the work place of investigative journalists to observe their real practices". These studies (and more) provided me with some general guidelines on how to approach media ethnography, but the newsroom observation I carried out was determined by the specific circumstances of my research and the initial research questions.

(a) Media ethnography: Sampling, interviewees, access and interviewing:

The ethnographic aspect (newsroom observation and in-depth interviews) of this research stems from the findings of the content analysis phase as well as some of the initial research questions. Research Question 5 (RQ5), for example, is concerned with how certain aspects of political culture in Nigeria may shape investigative journalism and press coverage of corruption in terms of general news output, relations between investigative reporters and public officials being investigated, or relations between sources of corruption stories such as anti-corruption agencies and the media. This requires interacting with journalists to get their views and experiences on such issues through in-depth interviews with a sample of them. Similarly, RQ4 examines the extent to which freedom of information legislation has impacted on investigative reporting of corruption over the study period, which in addition to the content analysis data, is further explained by data from interviews with reporters and editors. Furthermore, sampling for the media to observe and interview respondents also follow from sampling for the content analysis. Therefore, the four newspapers purposively selected for content analysis are also considered for observation, namely *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Daily Trust*. However, unlike the content analysis data which coded coverage of corruption in all the four newspapers selected and over the same twelve-year period, the observation was conducted at two of the newspapers, *Daily Trust* in Abuja and *The Guardian* in Lagos during September-October 2015 and November-December 2015 respectively. This had to do with both access and convenience. First, gaining access to *Daily Trust* in Abuja was not much of a problem, perhaps because I had worked there before and some of the editors know me. I spent a total of 6 weeks at *Daily Trust* collecting data. However, gaining access to the sampled media in Lagos was a completely different experience. It was not until the third week of my stay in the

city that I was able to gain access to *The Guardian* where I spent a further two weeks.²⁸ Also, it was simply more convenient for me to spend more time in Abuja than in Lagos. In total, then, both the newsroom observation and the interviews about four months, from late September 2015 to late January 2016. Overall therefore, ethnographic data for this research comprise field notes taken from my observations and conversations at two newspapers, as well as notes and recordings from formal and informal interviews with a total of 24 people.

The interviewees were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling procedures. Purposive sampling is used because of the nature of the research itself and the questions it seeks to answer. Stories of corruption, particularly corruption scandals, are a form of political news, since corruption, as defined in this work at least, is a political activity involving public officials. Thus, coverage of such activity is a form of political journalism, much like coverage of election campaigns or public policy. Furthermore, as noted earlier, media coverage is a key element that turns a corrupt act into a scandal, although the role of the media goes beyond mere reporting of corruption to actively constructing and framing scandals (Clemente and Gabbioneta, 2017: 1; Waisbord, 2004a: 1077). This further makes corruption news a form of political news. Moreover, as discussed in previous chapters, investigative journalism is itself a core aspect of the political function of the press, since it aims to hold the state and its functionaries accountable to the citizens, at least, within liberal

²⁸ On arrival, I wrote a letter to each of the papers, stating clearly what my mission was and how long I intended to stay and the things I would do. This was the same process I followed at *Daily Trust* in Abuja. However, none of the Lagos papers replied me. They kept telling me to come back the following day, or next week. In the end, I had to find a way to contact some of the journalists directly and through them was able to reach the editors to state my case. Still, my letter was not officially replied, not even at *The Guardian* where I was eventually allowed to spend two weeks. As we shall see, I considered this a finding in its own right, precisely similar to how some of the respondents said government organizations treat their FOIA requests for information. However, I still visited and did in-depth interviews with some journalists at *The Punch* and *Thisday* where I could not gain access for newsroom observation.

democratic theory of the media. However, there is a sense in which stories of corruption are also a form of economic or business news, since corrupt practices and their exposure have implications for both political and economic sectors of a country. Indeed, for countries like Nigeria, corruption is both a political and an economic issue, and is often engaged in by individuals and groups drawn from both politics and the corporate world, as our working definition here indicates.

In addition, investigative journalism is often practiced by specialist reporters or units within newspaper organizations (Doig, 1992: 46), particularly investigations of wrongdoing or corruption that is our concern here. This further makes purposive sampling appropriate for selecting interviewees for this study. Accordingly, I purposively selected and interviewed investigative reporters, political reporters, business reporters, several editors in each of the newspapers under study, including daily or weekend editors and senior editors like two editors-in-chief and one deputy editor-in-chief. My working assumption here is that this cohort of respondents are competent to speak about investigative reporting and coverage of corruption in the newspapers, including about how stories of corruption are sourced or reported, relationships between journalists and sources in investigating and reporting corruption, the workings of regulatory environment, including the freedom of information, etc.

At the two newspapers in which I gained access for newsroom observation (*Daily Trust* and *The Guardian*), selecting the respondents was quite straightforward, as over the weeks, I came to know the journalists by their roles and job descriptions, mostly through informal conversations with their colleagues or other staff in the organizations. Having already been given right of access to the newsrooms, I simply walk up to their desks, introduced myself and my research and sought their consent to hold formal or informal discussions with them.

However, sampling interviewees also involved a snowballing process in which recommended that I talk to other reporters they know, within the same newspaper organizations or elsewhere²⁹. At other times, snowballing arose out of ongoing discussions, for example, when a political reporter at *Daily Trust* told me that a colleague of his does a lot of investigative reporting even though he is not part of the paper's 'investigative desk'. This was also how I got to talk to the editor of the online newspaper, *Premium Times* in Abuja. Similarly, during discussion with some respondents, I learned about non-governmental organizations that work to investigative journalism in the media, like the Wole Soyinka Centre of Investigative Journalism, where I later held an interview with a senior staff member of the centre³⁰. Thus, all but four of the respondents are journalists or work within the media. Among the four who are not journalists are a former head of Nigeria's foremost anti-corruption agency, EFCC and the head of Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, a non-profit in Lagos. Invariably, the majority of the respondents are from *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* (in that order), the two newspapers where I had access. All but three are men³¹.

Furthermore, in general I held two types of interviews with the respondents. I regarded my conversations and dialogue with reporters and other during newsroom observation as informal interviews, since these were mostly recorded, with the consent of the respondents, though mostly unscheduled. These informal conversations ranged from a few minutes to about 45 minutes in length and I have generally considered them as part of data obtained from

²⁹ In most cases, the reporters also kindly afforded me with contacts, mostly mobile phone numbers and emails.

³⁰ During my initial conversations with her, she told me that their annual awards for investigative reporting in Nigeria was coming up around the same time in Lagos (December 2015), so I attended the event where I met with and later interviewed two award winners for investigative reporting from *Premium Times* and *Nation* newspapers, although both newspapers were not originally selected for the study.

³¹ I observed that political reporting is overwhelmingly dominated by men and had informal interviews on two female reporters on this and other issues and I believe this to be an interesting area for future research also.

the newsroom observation. The questions I asked during these informal engagements mostly arose from my observations in the newsrooms, which themselves are based on the original research questions. Some 22 of the interviews were formal, scheduled and ranged over 45 minutes to about two hours in length. I consider these as in-depth semi-structured interviews, which complete a tripod of the triangulation methodology used for the study: content analysis, newsroom observation and in-depth interviews. Almost all the formal interviews and informal conversations were held in a face-to-face context with the respondents, mostly in their offices, work-stations or somewhere on the premises of the newspaper organizations such as cafeteria or motor-park (for informal conversations only). Three in-depth interviews were however held on the phone because this was the most convenient means of talking with these respondents at the time. For five of the formal interviews, the interview process held in two or more sessions either complete an interview previously started or to follow up with additional questions. Also, questions for the in-depth interviews are generally of two types. Most issue from the data obtained from the content analysis aspect of the research and deal with issues such as why there appears to be much less independent reporting of corruption in the sample than stories of corruption generated by sources such as the national parliament and anti-corruption agencies, or why coverage of corruption tends to spike in some years but is significantly low in other years, or the effectiveness of the freedom of information act in the estimation of journalists in terms investigative reporting and coverage of corruption in the country³², etc. Other questions I asked during the interviews, however, deal directly some of the research questions, particularly those pertaining how journalists understand

³² I attach the interview schedule which was the general guide for the formal interviews; the informal ones were mostly spontaneous, sometimes triggered by an observation, though still within the general areas/questions of the research.

and approach investigative reporting, how it is organized within Nigerian newspapers, their relationships with various sources in coverage of corruption, and what factors, if any, influence corruption coverage in the country.

Finally, the respondents have had journalistic experience that range from 3 to 30 years, including editors, Saturday or Sunday editors, line editors, investigative reporters, regional correspondents, political reporters/editors, business reporters and one staff of the advert department at *Daily Trust*. All the interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder after which they were transcribed and stored in a secure external drive and an encrypted google drive account.

3.6 Reliability, Validity and Pilot Study:

As the data for this research were collected through different techniques and at different locations, it is useful to outline some of the procedures taken to ensure validity and reliability for the study. For quantitative content analysis research, establishing reliability of the data involves three considerations: the extent of stability of measurements overtime, the degree to which the data measured is replicable by other independent observers, and the accuracy or the extent to which measurements conform to known standards or which a research designs yields what it is designed to yield (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999: 270-271). For stability, reliability tests typically involve a test-retest procedure whereby the researcher measures the same subset of the sample at different periods and compare the measurements to check whether they have remained stable across the time lag. According to Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999: 271), accuracy tests, while being the most desirable, are untenable since there are no gold standards agreed to by experts to which all other measures can be set against. Thus, reproducibility is the 'strongest realistic method by default' for testing the reliability of content analysis data. Reproducibility entails inter-coder

reliability tests which can be carried out in different ways. The most typical of these is to a pair of coders code the same subset of the sample independently under similar conditions, and then to compare and report the percentage of agreement between the coders (Krippendorff, 2004: 414; Lombard et al, 2002: 589-590; Potter and Levine Donnerstein, 1999: 271-273). In this sense, the reliability of the data is a useful step towards ensuring its validity, not necessarily a sufficient one (Lombard et al, 2002: 589). However, an explicit and replicable coding scheme itself helps to systematize the coding process and thus improves the validity of the data collected by it (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999: 273). Also, in a similar study by Fink and Schudson cited severally above, only of the authors did the all coding, since, according to them, “the vast majority of the stories were easy calls” (ibid: 18). In other words, some studies use just a single coder, particularly in my case where I cannot afford a research assistant. Moreover, pilot studies further help to strengthen the validity of content analysis data, first by helping to sort out problems with coding at the initial stages of data collection and for testing inter-coder reliability (Lombard et al, 2002: 590). Therefore, inter-coder reliability, coding scheme and pilot studies together are sufficient for establishing validity of content analysis data (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999: 273). With some exceptions and modifications, I have followed these general principles.

First, as I collected all the data by myself, without the help of any research assistants, I did not calculate inter-coder reliability. However, I did several test and retest measurements in order to ensure the coding scheme and the coding itself were stable over time. This is by way of two pilot studies (in 2014) and one main analysis (in 2015-216). In the first pilot study, I selected samples for the first two months in the sampling frame for the first year of the research period (January and February 2001) for each of the four publications. This gives a total

of 40 sampled editions (10 each). With this small sample, I tested the coding in seven pre-identified content categories (IMI, ACA, NA, COI, FM, DOM, and Other)³³. These categories were based on my personal observation and familiarity with news coverage of corruption in Nigerian newspapers³⁴. The results of the pilot study held good for the two months of the sample taken only from 2001. That is, the seven categories appeared sufficient for coding corruption stories identified in the first two months of 2001. I then proceeded with coding the whole sample. After completing the full coding up to 2012 however, it turned out that over 60% of the stories were coded in the Other category alone, indicating that problems with categorization or unit of analysis or both³⁵. There are two explanations for the anomaly. The pilot study sample was not only too small, it was also ‘horizontal’, that is, taken in the same year, for a research that covers twelve years. But more significantly, by the starting year of the research (January 2001), the democratic government had just taken off only a few months earlier (May 1999). As such several of the factors that influence output of corruption news such activism of anti-corruption agencies and parliaments, elections, change officials in important offices, turn-over of political parties and so on were either minimal or non-existent in 2001. As a result, several types of corruption stories as well as the volume of it would have been manifest in 2001. Thus, I regarded that first full coding also as a pilot study, after which I refined and adjusted the coding scheme and the content categories to keep up with observations from the two pilot studies and recoded the data in 2015-2016 as described above by creating the FS and NC categories and taking

³³ See Section 3.4 (pages 88-89) above for detailed explanation of these terms

³⁴ Indeed, initial ideas for this research started from some personal observations and little familiarity with of coverage of corruption in Nigerian press, way back in 2011 and 2012.

³⁵ I had noticed the problem by midway through the coding process, but I decided to go through to the end of the same and redesign the research all over again. Thus, I regarded the full coding also as a pilot study, which helped me to finetune both the categories and the unit analysis for the second coding in 2015-2016.

accounting for type of corruption story (scandal, follow-up story and corruption talk) in the coding procedure.

Furthermore, the replicability of a coding scheme depends to some extent on whether the coding is for manifest or latent content, which in turn determines the extent to which a coder would use their own subjective schema in making coding decisions (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999: 267-268). For manifest content, where units are easily identifiable, coding is likely to be a straightforward 'clerical and computational' process and hence improves the validity of the data collected. This is precisely what Fink and Schudson mean by 'easy calls' above. It is also the case with my research where unit of analysis is the complete corruption story on the front page of the sample and coding done by source attribution or type of story, all of which are not difficult to spot for most of the stories. Thus, coding only requires following the scheme to allocate corruption stories to respective categories using simple nominal numbers, the easiest level of quantifying text. This leads to how reliability and validity for the overall data is established. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), procedures for demonstrating validity in qualitative research are different from those used in quantitative researches, but no less credible. Triangulation at varying levels (data sources, methods, investigators etc), for example, is a way of ensuring validity of the data because "researchers go through this process and rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study" (Creswell and Miller, 2000: 127). In other words, the iterative process inherent in triangulation research is itself a procedure for establishing the validity of data, since researchers typically cross check findings from particular methods and data sources to those of others, as is the case in this research. Furthermore, Bryman et al (2008) have identified several procedures for ensuring quality, and hence, reliability and validity in a mixed methods research.

These include integrating findings from both quantitative and qualitative components of the research or using different criteria for each of the components (ibid: 268-272). The above suggestions have been useful for me as well. First, the ethnography component of the research was informed both by some research questions that are best answered through qualitative data, as described above, as well as findings from the content analysis data. In all the formal and some of the informal interviews, I asked the respondents questions that issue directly from the content analysis data. There are many examples of this, as can be seen in the general interview guide. Broadly speaking, the responses served two uses. They helped to affirm, and therefore validate, aspects of the content analysis data to which I referred. Also, the responses illuminate aspects of the research that the content analysis data could not answer fully, which again justifies the triangulation technique. Indeed, respondents agreed with many of the observations that derive directly from the coding. Therefore, the use of triangulation of content analysis, observation and formal and informal interviews for this research is useful both for obtaining a fuller picture of the research questions, as well as for validating the data obtained from the various sources, as discussed under 'reflexivity' below.

3.7 Reflexivity and ethical considerations:

Reflexivity is not only a full disclosure about the researcher's personal and social location to the research itself, but also a means of improving the validity of the data collected, particularly for mixed methods researches involving qualitative techniques (Bryman et al, 2008: 272; Creswell and Miller, 2000: 127). The present effort is a product of many influences: personal observation of the subject matter and engagement with the literature above all. But it is also a product of my own general interests, inclinations and previous experiences,

both personal and professional. First, I have worked as a journalist in one of the newspapers studied here (*Daily Trust*), and although I took much care to ensure that does not influence me unduly, my relationship with them turned out to be crucial during the ethnographic component of the research. This relationship gained me access to that paper's management and subsequently newsroom and journalists. By contrast, the newspapers in Lagos were much less friendly, even though all the journalists I talked to were in general supportive and appreciative of the research effort. Consequently, *Daily Trust* journalists represent a disproportionate number of the respondents from which the ethnographic data was collected, though not in a way that imperils the data. In addition, the systematic nature of the content analysis coding procedure means that my relationship with *Daily Trust* has no impact whatsoever on the data collected, since any other independent coders will obtain more or less the same data by following the same coding procedures outlined in the coding scheme. Finally, my previous experience as a journalist, including bits of investigative and political reporting as well as personal observations as a member of Nigerian society, may have shaped some of my thinking and understanding of politics, corruption, journalism and press freedom, some of which may invariably leave traces upon this research.

3.8 Data Analysis and Missing Samples:

(a) Analysing media content: In this section, I briefly outline the procedures for data analysis adopted for this study, with a comment on the missing samples. Since the coding is based on simple frequency counts of occurrence or number of corruption stories coded, data here is presented mostly in frequency tables and graphs, in addition to detailed explanations of the findings. The sections that follow focus on specific aspects of the analysis such as overall coverage and

prominence as lead stories, annual trends and variation by publication and categories. In the next chapter, I discuss and interpret some key findings.

Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015: 211) have argued that quantitative content analysis research that deals with media coverage of a given subject generally measures attributes such as frequency of occurrence of the subject in the selected sample, the amount of space or time devoted to it, the favourability or otherwise of the coverage, etc. As Deacon et al (2007: 11) put it, content analysis commonly involves establishing “the frequency with which certain kinds of stories occur in the press, or the degree to which they are slanted towards a particular perspective within a high frequency of occurrence”. Similarly, for Bryman (2016: 287), doing content analysis research entails finding out the “representation of X in Y”, where X is the variable being measured, in our case, corruption stories, and Y being any media content in which X is represented, that is, front pages of the selected Nigerian newspapers. For this research, this means that the analysis measures the number of times corruption stories appear on the front page of a selected sample, that is frequency of corruption stories on the front page of a sampled edition and consequently in each of the categories. During coding, I first count and code the total number of news stories on the front page of a sample, and then read the stories to identify which are corruption stories and finally code them into respective content categories according to details of the procedure described in several sections of this chapter above. It is important to note that front pages of newspapers contain other contents such as editorials, opinion articles, pictures, graphics, etc. But these fall outside of the unit of analysis and were not counted or coded.

Furthermore, Andrew (2007: 28) suggests that newspaper headlines “introduce, advertise, and communicate the importance of a story to a viewer, reader, or

listener". This implies the bolder the headline, the more importance it is assumed to have by editors. Also, in her study of news reading, Graber (1988) finds that "prominence criteria" or "story importance cues" used by editors in newspaper stories such as headline font size and location of the story, are among the major factors that determine whether readers will read a news story at all (in Althaus and Tewksbury, 2002: 184). For the media therefore, to report any story at all is to give it some emphasis, to consider it as important for the audience, higher and above all other issues and events that could potentially make the news for that day, but which are not reported. And to report a story on the front page is to consider it more important than those in the inside pages, and yet even more emphasis where the story is reported as the lead story of the day, that is, the story with the boldest headline on the front page. In other words, taken together, the frequency of corruption stories and the prominence given to them in terms of positioning on the front page or ranking as lead stories, are all various dimensions of *emphasis* the newspapers in our sample give to the issue of corruption in the country. In this sense, these various dimensions of emphasis in media coverage can be highlighted through a systematic analysis of coverage of corruption in the sample. In the following analysis therefore, I consider measurable attributes of emphasis to corruption news in the sample such as the frequency or number of corruption stories per sample or in relation to overall news coverage, their prominence as frontpage leads, the amount of coverage coded for each of the nine categories, annual trends over the 12-year period, and how the frequencies compare or vary for each publication. In all cases, the data is presented through simple frequency tables and charts/graphs depicting the absolute number of corruption stories and relative frequencies, where the relative frequencies show the percentage of absolute frequency in a category to a given total. However, complex statistical analysis of the data was

considered unnecessary, since the research questions do not involve questions of causality, such as where x is assumed to cause y. In other words, only one variable, corruption story, is being measured by a simple frequency counts of its occurrence in respective categories, that is, the variable is measured at the nominal level of simple frequency counts as 0, 1, 2, 3 corruption stories, etc. Even for the case of whether the FOI Act in 2011 resulted in increase in investigative stories of corruption, I did a simple analytical comparison of coverage before and after 2011, rather than a statistical comparison.

For the ethnographic data, I follow a three-stage process of sorting, coding and thematic categorization. Interviews and conversations were first transcribed and combined as a single data set, since I considered transcripts of informal conversations as part the field notes. The initial process generated tens of codes or headings, which were then regrouped together under broader categories to which the headings were related. For example, among the codes in stage two are 'freedom of information law', 'proprietor influence', 'advertiser influence', etc. But these three subcategories were then further grouped under 'journalistic autonomy'. Responses by each journalist or editor which refers directly or indirectly to any of these subcategories were then copied and pasted under the relevant subcategory. Some of the codes and categories were pre-identified based on the research questions and the interview guidelines³⁶. Others emerged from the data itself and further review of literature during draft chapters. Indeed, this coding process continued throughout the writing phase of the research, as in most cases I needed to refine the codes once writing and discussion began.

(b) Combining quantitative and qualitative data:

³⁶ The interview guideline is attached in the appendix. However, some of the interviews differ slightly from the others, depending on the context of my meeting with a respondent.

A mixed method research invariably returns mixed data, often comprising varying degrees of both quantitative and qualitative data. But as Bryman (2016: 638-642) notes, doing a mixed methods research also entails decisions about priorities and sequence of the various components of the research, both during data collection and its analysis. The key questions, Bryman shows, are which components of the data to prioritize in the research, and which should precede which? In this sense, he observes, a researcher has two broad choices: to regard both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research as equal in weight, or to prioritize either the quantitative or qualitative component (*ibid*). For this research, the content analysis (quantitative component) is prioritized over the qualitative component involving media ethnography, and as the sections above demonstrate, was carried out first. Therefore, in the analysis and discussion that follow in chapters 4 through 7, I regard the content analysis data as the primary data and use data from the interviews and field notes to further explain and elaborate the findings of the content analysis component. There are three justifications for this approach. First, the interview and observation data were themselves largely informed by the results of the content analysis research. As stated earlier above, while the content analysis revealed several findings about the way the extent of coverage of corruption in the sample, it also threw up certain important questions that required talking to involved actors to understand further. For example, why was new reports of corruption concentrated in a handful of years rather than evenly distributed across the 12-year period of the research? Why was extent of coverage considerably similar across at least three of the four publications selected for analysis? Why was there no significant increase in the coverage of corruption following the adoption of the freedom of Information Act in 2011? Why is high coverage of corruption in the sample analysed also associated with a high extent of

information subsidy by state level actors investigating corruption such as anti-corruption agencies and the national parliament? And how do journalists understand and do investigative reporting of corruption in Nigeria? Such questions became necessary to understand and explain findings of the content analysis, and hence the need to engage involved actors such as investigative reporters and editors through interviews and newsroom observation in the first place. Indeed, it is also for these reasons that the qualitative component of the research sequentially followed the quantitative component as mentioned above. Secondly, and following from the foregoing, most of the questions in the interview schedule were derived from findings of the content analysis aspect of the data collection process. Accordingly, in the analysis that follow, particularly in chapters 5 and 6 that combine data from both components of the study, the interview and observation data are used to further explain and provide additional details for the findings of the content analysis data. Finally, some original research questions such as how Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting and what specific factors influence its practice in the country's media are better answered by qualitative techniques like interviews and newsroom observation, as previously argued above. Nevertheless, such questions, and the data they generate, still help to support the general objective of the study for which the content analysis was designed, namely how and to what extent Nigerian newspapers report corruption and what roles, if any, investigative reporting particularly plays in reporting corruption in the press. Thus, in this broad sense, the qualitative data from the interviews and observation generally function to elaborate the findings of the content analysis on which our discussion and analysis is significantly based. In practice therefore, this means that only those aspects of the ethnographic data that relates to

findings of the content analysis, or some of the research questions are used in the analysis and discussion in the empirical chapters below.

(c) Missing Samples:

In this regard, it is useful to note that 174 selected samples were missing in the archives, for all the four publications combined. This represents 5.96% of total 2920 sampled editions initially selected for analysis. Table 3.1 below shows the missing editions for each publication, relative to its total sample. A total of 32 sampled editions were missing for *Daily Trust*, 49 for *The Punch*, and 54 and 39 for *The Guardian* and *Thisday* respectively, giving a combined total of 174 missing samples. In other words, missing editions vary slightly between the four publications, from 4.38% in *Daily Trust* to 7.40 in *The Punch*.

Table 3.1: Missing Samples from the selected newspapers

Publications	Number of Samples Selected	Number of Missing Samples	Number of Samples Coded	% of Missing Samples
<i>Daily Trust</i>	730	32	698	4.38%
<i>The Guardian</i>	730	49	681	6.71%
<i>The Punch</i>	730	54	676	7.40%
<i>Thisday</i>	730	39	691	5.34%
Total	2920	174	2746	5.96%

Some existing studies have dealt with cases of missing editions or samples in a variety of ways. Several content analysis studies simply report the missing issues as 'missing data' or 'missing issues' (Cohen et al, 2008: 430; Dimitrova, 2006: 83; Faber et al, 1993: 72; Brown et al, 1987: 49). However, in a sample of 1,820 issues or editions selected over five years designed to measure four variables (number of photographs, number of graphics, number of stories, number of staff stories), Lacey et al (2001: 839) report that 5 of the selected samples were

missing. However, they argue that “with 1,820 issues, it is highly improbable that these missing data would have changed the conclusions of this study”. This suggests that if the sample is large and the missing editions are few, then there is good chance that the missing editions will not affect the outcomes of the research significantly. Also, Deacon (2007) conducts several reliability tests on the Lexis-Nexis digital archive to determine the extent to which digital archives are reliable over time. In one of these tests, he compares news contents of three random dates “distributed five months apart and checked each item published in the hard copies” of each of 8 UK national dailies “to see whether it was present in the Lexis-Nexis archive”. He finds that “overall 5% of the items were found to be missing” (Deacon, 2007: 18-19), although there was some variation of the missing items between the newspapers coded and the three dates, with missing samples in some papers rising to 7%. He concludes, however, that (ibid: 19):

a reassuring aspect of these findings is that no systematic pattern was evident in the omitted material. Therefore, it could be argued that low level omissions represent a type of random rather than constant sampling error; i.e. they have implications for the degrees of confidence we can have in any media sample we derive through these means, but they do not completely compromise its credibility

This research suggests two issues that are useful for me here. First, omissions of around 5%-7% can be considered “low level” omissions which do not compromise the credibility of the research. Secondly, if missing samples do not indicate any clear patterns, they can be considered part of random sampling error, that is, error inherent in a sample relative to the population. Therefore, given that the samples were selected randomly, and that the overall final sample of 2746 editions is considerably large for 12-year period, I believe that the

missing editions will not significantly affect the findings presented here. But there are two additional reasons for my confidence. As observed previously, corruption stories, particularly scandals, tend to stay longer in the media agenda over several days, sometimes even weeks and months. Thus, because the interval between one sampled edition and the next is only 6 days, there is a high chance that corruption stories missed in any edition could well be captured in the follow-up story category. Secondly, as we shall see, just 37.51% of the total sample contained one or more corruption stories. This means that nearly two-thirds of the sample contained no corruption story at all. If this statistic were extrapolated for the missing sample, the margin of error in the research caused by the missing sample is reduced further, and thus corresponds to Deacon's observation above that for low level omissions, the error in the sample is no more than error inherent in all samples.

Chapter Four: Data I: Corruption in the Nigerian press (1999-2012)

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter, and the subsequent chapters (5, 6, and 7) build on the foundational chapters above to present findings of the research intended to answer the research questions on how and the extent to which Nigerian newspapers report corruption, how much of that coverage is investigative reporting, and so on. In brief, we find that corruption is extensively reported in Nigerian newspapers. This is evident in several respects. First, coverage of corruption accounts for over 8% of all frontpage news coverage in the newspapers sampled. This implies at least two corruption stories on the frontpage of these newspapers every week. Furthermore, just about one third of the total corruption stories coded were reported as lead stories in the days in which they appear in the news. This indicates that corruption stories figure prominently in the media's agenda setting in the country. Moreover, about 10% of the sampled editions carry multiple stories of corruption, sometimes up to three or more different corruption stories on the same frontpage. This further indicates extensiveness of coverage of corruption by the newspapers. Also, this coverage varies significantly from one year to another, but only slightly between the four publications. Indeed, stories of corruption in the sample are clustered around five 'golden' years of coverage, from 2005-2009, although a steady increase in the amount of corruption reported in the sample is observed throughout the 12-year period covered by the research. Viewed in terms of variation by individual publications, *The Guardian* tends to report corruption significantly less than the other three publications selected. Also, we find three types of corruption stories in the newspapers in general. Scandals, or stories of alleged or real acts of corruption make up 45.72% of the total. Follow-up stories, or additional stories

about previously reported scandals constitute 28.48% of total corruption coverage in the sample, while narratives of corruption or stories about the general state of corruption in Nigeria, rather than actual practices by any persons or groups of persons, make up the remainder (25.80%). Details of these findings are presented and discussed in this chapter. Most of the coverage of corruption in the sample results, however, from press reporting of the activities and investigations of corruption by state level actors such as anti-corruption agencies, national assembly, commissions of inquiry, etc, rather than from independent investigations of corruption by the newspapers. Less than 5% of total coverage of corruption in the sample is due to independent investigative journalism, although this rises to about 10% for corruption scandals specifically. Furthermore, we find that corruption scandals in the sample are generated by a variety of sources and actors: independent media investigations by the newspapers or their reporters (10.41%), anticorruption agencies (29.76%), national and state assemblies (21.79%), commissions of inquiry (16.10%), foreign media (2.44%), diaspora/online media (0.81%). Sources such as the courts, the police, whistle-blowers and so on supply 18.70% of the scandal stories coded. In other words, stories of real or alleged wrongdoing involving specific persons and sums (scandals) are subsidized for the press by almost 90%. Details of these findings are discussed in chapter five, including our argument that in the specific context of corruption stories in a developing democracy like Nigeria, information subsidy may not always be a bad thing for the news. In chapter six, I examine the organizational and operational context of investigative reporting in the newspapers sampled, by drawing on ethnographic data from the interviews and observation. I find that investigative journalism is scarcely institutionalized in the newspapers and is no more than adhoc practice by the few journalists who practice it. Full-time investigative reporters are rare

in all the newspapers as most journalists who do investigative reporting generally combine it with other daily beats. Also, only one of the four publications has a separate investigative journalism unit or desk in the newsroom. But even at this paper, investigative reporting remains largely subsumed under general editorial direction in terms of budget, deadlines, rewards and so on. Still, internally within the organizations, journalists claim they have and demonstrate a reasonable level of journalistic autonomy and initiative, in the way they source stories of corruption, and in their relationships with news sources and targets of corruption in the news they report. Several respondents claim that their editors and publishers encourage them to do investigative stories, and even reward them personally for demonstrating journalistic enterprise in investigative reporting; that they enjoy considerable independence and initiative, with little or no interference from their bosses within the organizations. At the same time however, the external and wider regulatory environment for investigative journalism is not entirely conducive for investigating stories of corruption. Investigative reporters face subtle, and not so subtle verbal, legal and occasionally physical threats from public officials being investigated by reporters for corrupt practices. Furthermore, because government plays an outsized role not only in politics and public policy, but also in business and the market, public officials also have considerable influence in the advertising market and use this power to 'punish' media organizations that are inclined towards investigative reporting. Thus, government controls not only the political and regulatory environment of the press, but also significant aspects of the media market since government is at once the largest advertiser in the country. Indeed, a crucial finding of this research is that government institutions and officials in Nigeria generally refrain from direct political censorship of the press, but do not hesitate to deny advertising to 'erring' newspapers. This

possibly explains the near consensus in the literature, as we have seen in preceding chapters above, that press freedom in Nigeria is relatively higher than in other African countries.

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press and a freedom of information legislation came into force in 2011. However, neither is operationally effective in enhancing journalistic investigations and reporting of corruption. Journalists report that officials use delay tactics or other forms of subterfuge to refuse freedom of information requests. The culture of bureaucratic secrecy, supported by colonial laws such as the Official Secret Act, remains deeply entrenched, despite the constitutional guarantees for press freedom and freedom of information legislation. Indeed, in the sample of newspapers analysed, there is no appreciable increase in the amount of independent investigative reporting of corruption between the period before and after freedom of information legislation. In addition, most public institutions lack robust databases which makes information retrieval difficult and sometimes impossible altogether. Moreover, several respondents claim that Nigerian journalists themselves are not sufficiently trained for investigative reporting, do not stay on the job long enough to acquire useful experiences and worse, corruption within journalism itself is rife. The result of the foregoing is that there is limited investigative stories of corruption in the press, less than 5% of overall coverage of corruption, and conversely, an over-reliance on information subsidy for news of corruption from the corruption investigating authorities (CIA) in the country. Details of these findings are discussed in chapter six, including the various ways in which information subsidy for news of corruption actually promotes more watchdog journalism in the press, and an interpretation of what this may mean for the watchdog functions of the press in Nigeria and other developing democracies in Africa and elsewhere. But again, by comparing

corruption stories independently investigated by the newspapers to those reported from the CIAs, I show, in chapter seven, that investigative reporting is not only low in terms of quantity of reporting, but also in terms of the scale of corruption independently reported in comparison to the corruption cases exposed by the CIAs. In the concluding chapter (Chapter 8), I review some of the core arguments and findings of the research and its contributions to the literature, as well as point some ways towards further research.

4.2 Coverage of corruption: Frequency, Prominence, Trends, Publications

Our first finding is the total news coverage itself, that is, the total number of stories on the front pages against which corruption news is measured³⁷. We find that a total of 16613 news stories were reported on the front pages of the 2746 sampled editions in the four titles. This is represented by the Total News Coverage (TNC) column in Table 4.1 below. The Total News Coverage (TNC) category is the category into which all news stories were coded by a simple frequency count, including but not limited to corruption news. This is to give a measure of the frequency of corruption stories relative to total frontpage news coverage. In the table above, we can see that 16613 total news stories were coded from the front pages of the total 2476 editions in the sample, of which 1345 (8.10%) were corruption stories. This total news coverage gives an average of 6.05 news stories per sample ($16613/2746 = 6.05$). This means that for every edition coded, there are an average of 6 news stories reported on the front page.

³⁷ Some researchers doing content analysis of press coverage of corruption, for example Dincer and Johnstone (2016), code only politics related stories, such as election news, party news, policy news, news about political actors and institutions and so on, rather than all news stories. This is to determine the percentage of corruption stories in relation to all political reporting in a sample. The process is the same, but details defer according to research questions. In fact, I considered doing this too, since it is useful to be able to say that corruption news is X% of total political reporting. However, I thought that for my research, it is more useful to be able to say that corruption news is X% of total news coverage, than just X% of political news coverage. Also, coding against only political news will entail additional categories for all political news and therefore complicate the coding for me. I explain this point in detail in the conclusion.

The Punch reported the most number of stories per sample (7.33), followed by *The Guardian* (7.01), slightly higher than the overall average of stories per sample. These two newspapers account for 58.55% of total news stories coded in the sample. *Daily Trust* and *Thisday* carried fewer news stories per front page at 5.35 and 4.57 news stories respectively. Thus, *The Punch* and *The Guardian* generally report more news stories on the front page than *Daily Trust* and *Thisday*. One possible explanation for this variation is the differences in house styles for each paper. Some newspapers stack their front pages with lots of headlines, others prefer fewer. Another explanation is the recent but growing tendency by Nigerian newspapers to place classifieds on their front pages. These ads take up news space that could otherwise have been used for more front-page news stories. *Thisday* and *Daily Trust* tended to place more classified ads on the front page than *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. This helps to explain why *Thisday* and *Daily Trust* have fewer front page stories. But as we shall see in the case of *The Guardian*, more front-page news coverage does not mean more news of corruption.

Table 4.1 Corruption stories in the samples newspapers (*Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Punch* & *Thisday*)

Publications	Total News Coverage	Total Frequency of Corruption Stories	% of Corruption Stories
Daily Trust	3731	330	8.84%
The Guardian	4775	249	5.21%
The Punch	4952	459	9.27%
Thisday	3155	307	9.73%
Overall	16613	1345	8.10%

Furthermore, corruption stories make up 8.10% of total frontpage news coverage in the sampled newspapers over the 12-year research period³⁸. Interpreted differently, 8.10% of total news coverage means that on average, slightly over two corruption stories (2.16) are reported in these newspapers every single week for the entire 12 years running³⁹. This is very significant considering that corruption is just one out countless other issues that could potentially make front page news during the same period. One reason why coverage of corruption in the newspapers is this high is that many samples carry two or more different corruption stories on the front page of the same edition. Figure 4. 2 below shows the frequency of corruption stories per sample, from 0 in which no corruption story is reported in a sampled edition to 5 in which the same sampled edition carries five different corruption stories. In total, at least one corruption story was reported in 37. 51% of the total 2476 samples coded. Of these, 28.44% of the sample carries one corruption story. 7.06% of the sample carries two corruption stories, while 1.64% of the sample carries three different corruption stories on the same front page. In sum, the above figures imply that well over one-third of editions in these newspapers report at least one story about corruption on the front page, indicating that corruption is a major issue in Nigerian newspapers' agenda. Indeed, the observation that nearly 10% of the sample reports contains two or more corruption stories on the same front page is by itself a further indication of the importance of prominence of corruption to overall news coverage in Nigerian newspapers. In one edition of *The Punch* (19 November 2005), 5 out a total of 7 stories on the front page were corruption stories. In one story, then President Obasanjo was reported to have

³⁸ This figure is obtained by dividing total corruption stories (1345) through total news stories (16613) and then multiply 100. That is $(1345/16613) \times 100 = 8.10\%$.

³⁹ Since we take a year as 365 days, there will be 52 weeks per year or 624 weeks in 12 years. Therefore, we have an average of $(1345/624) = 2.16$ corruption stories each week throughout the 12 years.

said that all heads of the parastatals and agencies under the Aviation Ministry were corrupt, but without specifying the officials in question, or the specific acts, or the amounts possibly involved (an NC story). This was presented as the lead story of the day. Another story reported that former Governor of Bayelsa State had been suspended from then ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) over charges of money laundering he was then facing in court (a follow-up story). The third was an investigative story of fraudulent allocation of land worth N50m involving the officials of Lagos State Government (an IMI story). The fourth story reported that the anti-corruption agency, ICPC, had charged then PDP Deputy National Chairman, Abubakar Magaji to court over corruption (an ACA story). The final corruption story reported that officials of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation who connived with Nigerian con men to defraud a Brazilian businessman of over \$200m over purchase of an oil field had been sent to jail (another follow up-story).

Table 4.2: Frequency of corruption stories per sample edition

Frequency of Corruption Stories Per Sample	Number of Samples	% of Corruption Stories Per Sample
0	1716	62.49%
1	781	28.44%
2	194	7.06%
3	45	1.64%
4	9	0.33%
5	1	0.04%
Total	2746	100.00%

Notes: The table shows frequency of corruption stories per sample since some samples have more than one corruption story, while others have none at all. This is indicated by the coloured column in the table, from 0 to 5 which occurs only once in the sample.

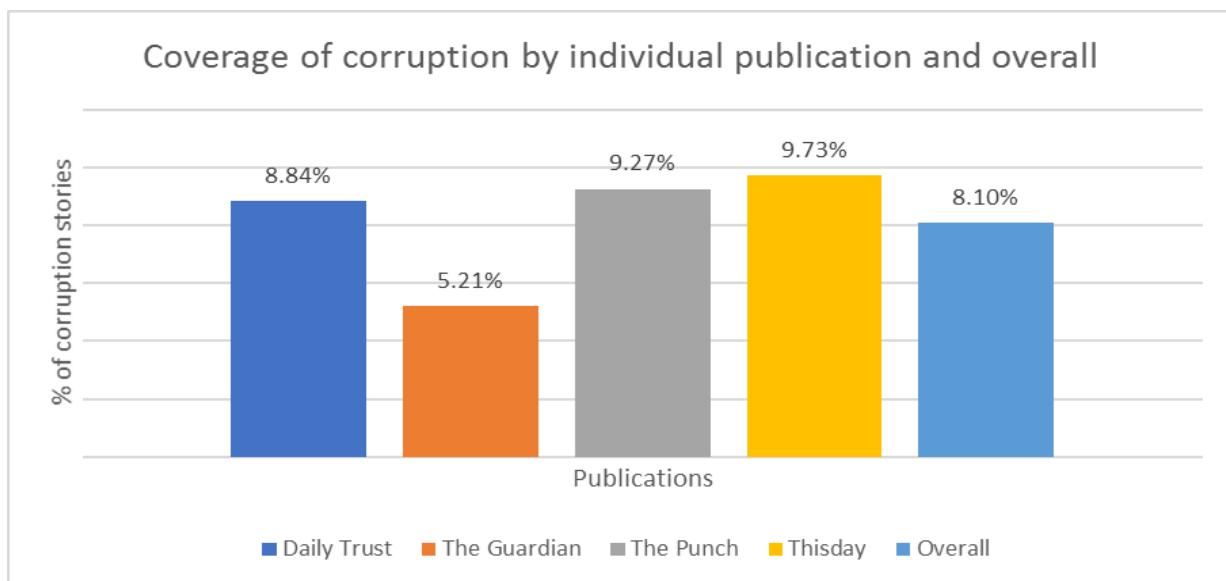
(a) Variations by publications:

In the previous sections, we have seen that corruption is extensively reported in these newspapers. Corruption stories alone constitute 8.10% of total frontpage news coverage. In fact, 9.07% of the total sampled newspapers on the same front page. Additionally, we find that about one-third of all corruption stories in the sample were front page lead stories, further indicating a high significance of corruption in these newspapers' agenda. There is some variation across individual publications however. For example, the number of corruption stories reported by *The Punch* is almost double that of *The Guardian*, even though both carry much the same number of total news stories per sample as mentioned above. As Table 4.2 above shows, in absolute terms, that is, in terms of total number of corruption stories reported by each publication, *The Punch* leads the pack with (459) corruption stories, followed by *Daily Trust* (330), *Thisday* (307), and *The Guardian* (249) making up the total 1345 corruption stories reported by the newspapers combined over the research duration. However, in relative terms, that is, in terms of percentage of corruption coverage relative to total news coverage, *Thisday* leads the rest with 9.73% of its total frontpage news coverage devoted to corruption alone. This is followed by *The Punch* (9.27%), and *Daily Trust* (8.84%), and finally *The Guardian* (5.21%). Thus, while three of the publications are above average coverage of 8.10%, *The Guardian* is below the, as Figure 4.1 shows below. But even *The Guardian*'s coverage of corruption at 5.21% of its overall frontpage news output is still reasonably high considering that corruption is only one issue out of numerous others.

Furthermore, coverage also differs between the publications in terms of *multiple* corruption stories per sample. For example, 14.50% of the samples in *The Punch* carry two or more corruption stories, well above the 9.07% of samples in the combined data that carry two or more stories. Indeed, as shown

above, in one sample of *The Punch*, 5 out of 7 news stories were on corruption. In other words, while front page coverage of corruption is generally high in the sample, three out of four publications under consideration still give it even more coverage. This indicates two things. First, it shows that in both absolute and relative terms, there is only a slight variation in the coverage of corruption by three of the four publications under study. Secondly, coverage of corruption in *The Guardian* tends to be significantly lower than the other three publications, again, in both absolute and relative terms. These two observations raise an important question which I consider in the next chapter: why is reporting of corruption significantly similar in three of the publications but much different in the fourth?

Figure 4.1: Percentage of corruption stories to total news coverage



(b) Lead Corruption stories:

Additionally, we noted above that lead stories, identified as the stories with the boldest headline on the front page, are considered the most important stories of the day in newspapers. Table 4.4 below shows that 31.08% of the total corruption stories coded were reported as lead story for the days they were

published. In other words, about one-third of all stories of corruption covered in the sample were considered most important for the respective days of their publication. This further indicates the extent to which corruption reported in these newspapers, and by implication other media in Nigeria, namely as an issue of considerable importance. *Thisday* reported the most lead stories, with 37.13% of its total corruption stories as lead. *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* are almost at par in this regard, reporting 33.33% and 32.13% of their respective totals as lead. *The Punch*, which has both the highest number of corruption stories and highest instances of multiple coverage of corruption per sample, comes tends to lead the news less with a corruption story, at 24.84% of its stories on corruption leading the news. In other words, while *The Punch* is more likely to report issues of corruption than the other newspapers, it is least likely to lead news with a corruption story than the other publications in the sample. In general, then, we see that there are only slight variations in the prominence given to the subject of these newspapers.

Table 4.3 Corruption stories as lead stories

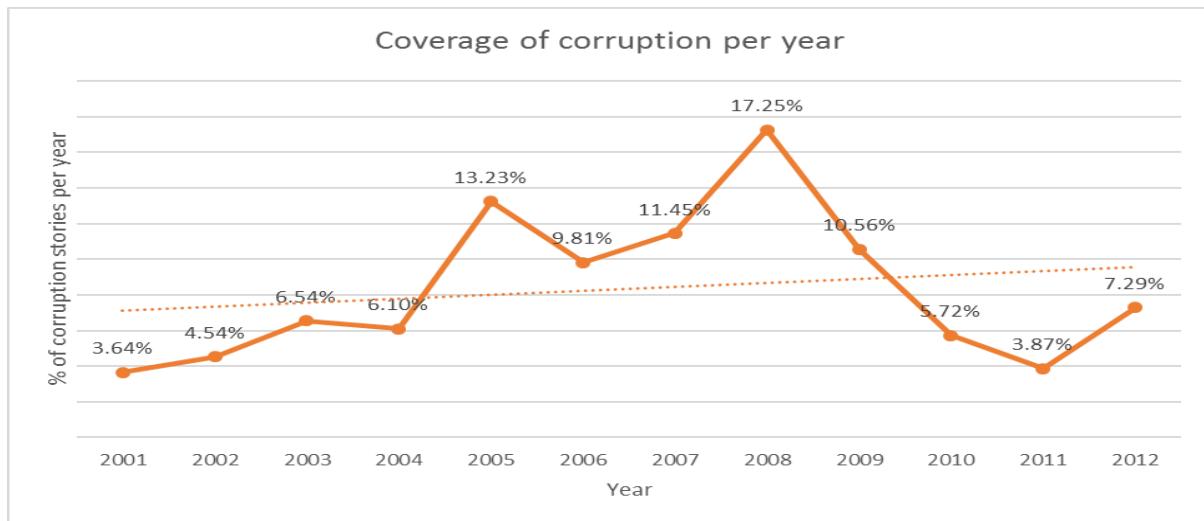
Publications	A	B	TCS	% A	% B
Daily Trust	110	220	330	33.33	66.67
The Guardian	80	169	249	32.13	67.87
The Punch	114	345	459	24.84	75.16
Thisday	114	193	307	37.13	62.87
TOTAL	418	927	1345	31.08	68.92

Notes: A = Frequency of lead corruption stories. B = frequency of non- lead corruption stories. TCS = Total corruption stories for each publication, i.e. (A + B). % A and % B are percentage of totals, obtained by dividing A or B through TCS. E.g. for Daily Trust, % of lead corruption stories %A = $(110/330) \times 100 = 33.33\%$. % of non-lead corruption stories %B = $(220/330) \times 100 = 66.67\%$. Same procedure for each publication and for combined totals.

(c) Annual trends of coverage:

Furthermore, annual trends of coverage of a given issue is also a useful way of understanding how and the extent of media performance on the issue, in this case corruption in the sampled newspapers. Figure 4.2 below shows the patterns of coverage over the research period. First, the trend (dotted) line in the centre of the chart shows a steady increase in output of corruption news, from less than 5% in the starting year (2001) to over 8%, which in fact is the overall coverage, in the final year of the research (2012). This means that coverage increases overtime in the sampled period taken as a whole. At the same time however, as the various peaks and troughs (high and low points) in the chart show, corruption coverage still rises or falls sharply in some years. These are important findings. For example, it implies that as Nigeria moves further away from the founding or transition election in 1999, coverage of corruption increases. This in turn indicates some correlation between democratic political processes and coverage of corruption, including perhaps increasing press freedom, or other factors in the wider political system. These two trends (steady increase and rise and fall) raise two important questions which we pursue in the next chapter: why does coverage of corruption increase steadily overtime and why does it rise and fall sharply?

Figure 4.2: Annual trends of coverage of corruption in the sample



Notes: x-axis represents the years from 2001 to 2012 while y axis shows the percentage of corruption stories to total frontpage news coverage for each year.

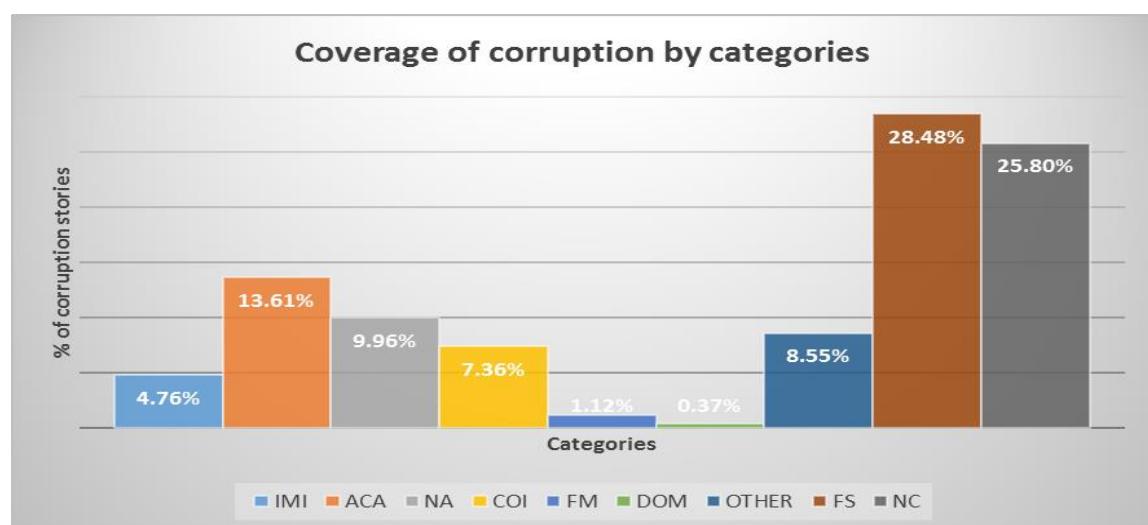
In addition, the rise and fall of coverage indicates two patterns. First, it shows a wide variation between the years. For example, the amount of coverage in 2008 (17.25% of total frontpage news) is more than four times higher than in 2001 (3.64%). Similarly, coverage in 2005 (13.23%) is almost four times higher than in 2011 (3.87%), the year freedom of information act was adopted. Moreover, the rise and fall of corruption stories is often quite sharp between any two years, for example from 6.10% in 2004 to more than double that figure in 2005 (13.23%). It falls from a high of 17.25% (2008) to almost half of that in the next year in 2009 (10.56%). Significantly, it rises from a low of 3.87% in 2011 to 7.29% in 2012 a year after adoption of FOI law. Indeed, the amount of corruption stories in 2005 alone is about two-thirds of the previous four years combined, indicating disproportionate coverage between the years.

Thirdly, Figure 4.2 above reveals that the years 2005 through 2009 can be described as the 'golden years' of reporting corruption in these newspapers. These five years alone account for almost two thirds or 62.30% of the total

corruption stories reported in the 12 years studied. In fact, the five years (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) have an average coverage of 12.46%, well above the overall average of 8.10%. Still, even among these five years, 2005 and 2008 stand out. These two years alone account for 30.48% or nearly one third of the total for the 12-year period. In other words, while overall coverage of corruption tends to be high in the sample, it is significantly skewed towards some years than others. I discuss the implications of these findings, both to the research questions and existing literature in the next chapter.

4.3: Sources of corruption stories in the Nigerian press:

Figure 4.3: Sources of corruption stories in the Nigerian press



Notes: The figures for amount of corruption stories generated by Foreign Media (Blue bar) and Diaspora/Online Media (Green bar) categories appear unclear. The figures are 1.12% and 0.37% respectively. IMI: Independent Media Investigations. ACA: Anti-Corruption Agencies. NA: National (and State) Assemblies. COI: Commissions of Inquiry. FM: Foreign Media. DOM: Diaspora/Online Media. FS: Follow-up corruption stories. NC: Narratives of Corruption stories

Data above illustrates three dimensions in press coverage of corruption in Nigeria that we analyse and discuss in the next chapter. First, overall coverage of corruption news is 'bloated' by two categories: follow-up stories and narratives of corruption, which together constitute more than half of total

corruption news in the sample (54.28%). This can be seen by the tallest bars to the right of Figure 4.3 above and explains why the distribution skews to the right of the chart. In other words, more than half of corruption stories in the sample are either about corruption cases already reported (follow up stories) or are stories which do not refer to any specific instances of corruption at all (narratives of corruption stories). This has implications for some of the standard methods of measuring corruption such as those used by Transparency International and the World Bank. Secondly, official sources or state level actors and institutions involved in investigating corruption dominate news reports of corruption in the sample. For convenience, I refer to these as 'corruption investigating authorities' to distinguish them from independent media sources through investigative reporting. These corruption-investigating-authorities (CIAs) include anti-corruption agencies (ACA category: 13.61%), parliamentary investigations (NA category: 9.96%), administrative panels and commissions of inquiry (COI category: 7.36%), and other official sources like the courts, the police and whistle blowers (Other category: 8.55%). Combined, corruption stories attributed to these sources make up about 40% (exactly 39.48%) of total news of corruption coded in the sample⁴⁰. Indeed, a good majority of the follow-up stories (FS category) concern corruption stories generated by these agencies through their investigations of corruption. This indicates that some sources or categories are more important in generating news of corruption in the press than others. Third, stories of corruption generated by independent media investigations (IMI category) amount to 4.76% of total corruption coverage, a key finding for this research. Also, foreign media (FM category) and Diaspora online media sources (DOM category) account for 1.12% and 0.37% of total

⁴⁰ The four categories (ACA, NA, COI and Other) add up to 531 corruption stories or 39.48% of the total 1345 corruption stories in the sample.

respectively. Therefore, corruption stories generated independently by the four newspapers fall well below those of established sources, namely, corruption investigating authorities, foreign media and diaspora online media. The key element here is that corruption stories attributed to these established sources are reported through *routine* journalistic practices, rather than by *independent* investigative reporting. This has several implications for the watchdog and political accountability functions of the press, as I argue throughout subsequent chapters.

(a) Corruption investigating authorities as sources of corruption news:

As noted earlier, 45.72% of total corruption news are stories of real or alleged corruption. Four categories or sources (ACA, NA, COI, Other) dominate these news reports of corruption, accounting for 39.48% of total coverage. In contrast, independent media investigations of corruption generate just 4.76%. This indicates the significance of corruption investigating authorities as established sources of corruption news. For example, this finding implies that without these CIAs, there will be very little coverage of actual corrupt practices, real or alleged in the press. But the point of this thesis is that investigations and reports of these CIAs, which generates the bulk of news about wrongdoing in government, is itself influenced by the prevailing culture of anti-corruption in Nigerian politics, which creates the general climate for reporting corruption and influences the form and substance of investigative reporting in the country. This significance is further marked by a higher than average lead stories from these sources: 38.80% leads for ACA, 35.07% for NA and 41.41% for COI categories respectively, against the average of 31.08% lead stories for all the categories combined. Therefore, CIA stories tend to be given the most prominence. Indeed, the COI category has the highest lead stories of any in the sample, with about half of its stories reported as frontpage leads (41.41%) against an overall average of 30.08%. But

the COI category comprises investigative panels set up by presidents, governors, ministers and so on, thus consistent with previous research which suggests that political news gravitates towards the most powerful or ‘authoritative’ sources (Broersma et al, 2013: 389; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2009: 77). Only the Other category, comprised of sources such as police, courts and ‘political whistle-blowers’⁴¹, has a lower than average leads at just 20% of its category total, a possible indication that sources in this category are lower down in the hierarchy of authoritative sources of corruption news. However, much like the overall distribution of corruption stories in the sample, stories from these actors and sources are concentrated in the same ‘golden’ years between 2005 and 2009. For example, 65.85% of corruption stories attributed to anti-corruption agencies were reported during these five years.

(b) Anti-corruption Agencies (ACA) Category:

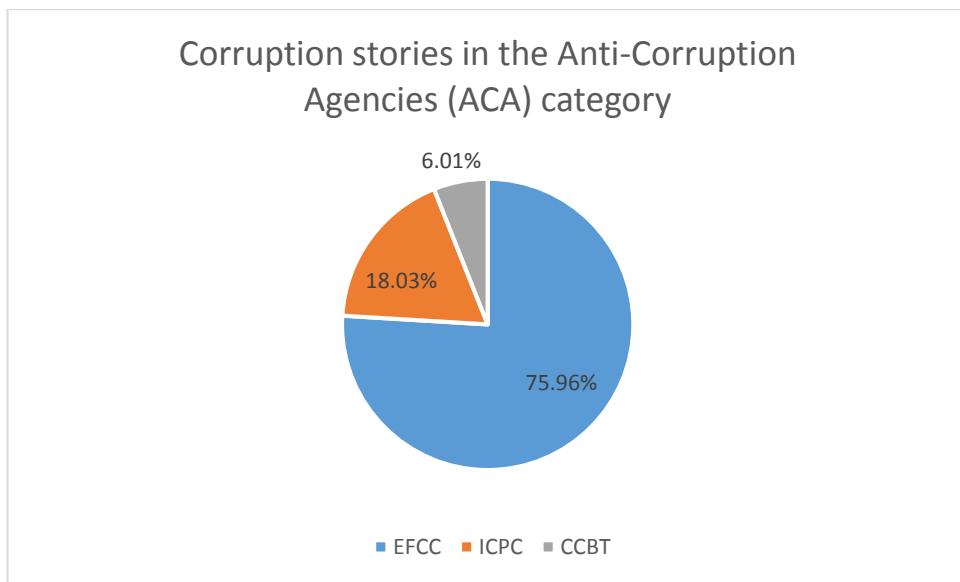
Also, of these four categories, anti-corruption agencies make up the largest sources generators of corruption scandals, representing 13.61% of total distribution⁴². As Figure 4.4 below shows, EFCC alone initiated 75.96% of the category total, while the remainder were attributed to the ICPC and CCBT. This is not surprising, since EFCC is generally regarded as the foremost anti-corruption agency in the country. A report by the Human Rights Watch describes EFCC as “the most promising avenue to make tangible progress in the fight

⁴¹ I use ‘political whistle blowers’ because majority of corruption stories from whistle blowers had come from politicians who, as more than half of the interview respondents say are either aggrieved or have ulterior motives, in this sense, whistle-blowing is for political purposes, rather than strictly public interest.

⁴² The three most prominent anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria are the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC); and the Code of Conduct Bureau, with its special court or Tribunal (CCBT). These are permanent state institutions with the sole function of fighting corruption. In addition to these, however, there are sector specific watchdogs such as Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NIETI), for the oil industry; Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission (RMFC) which monitors how government revenue is generated and distributed. These two were also sources of corruption stories coded. I have classed these under the COI category as they have other mandates besides fighting corruption.

against corruption” in Nigeria (Albin-Lackey, C., & Guttschuss, 2011: 1). EFCC is well-known for its high-profile investigations of corruption. Such investigations have included that of former Inspector General of Police mentioned above, as well as Governors of virtually all the 36 states, ministers, senators and many others. It claims to have recovered some \$11 billion through its investigations (ibid). These investigations generated breaking stories and tons of follow-up stories in the press. Unsurprisingly then, the same Human Rights Watch report describes EFCC’s first chair, Mr Nuhu Ribadu as “dynamic and media savvy” who cultivated the friendship and support of the media and civil society activists in the country early in the life of the commission. Moreover, both the ICPC and the CCBT are similarly centres of news of corruption through their own investigations into corrupt practices of various public officials in the country. But as the distribution above shows, it is either they have not been as ‘active’ or as ‘media savvy’ as the EFCC.

Figure 4.4: Corruption stories in the sample by Anti-Corruption Agencies



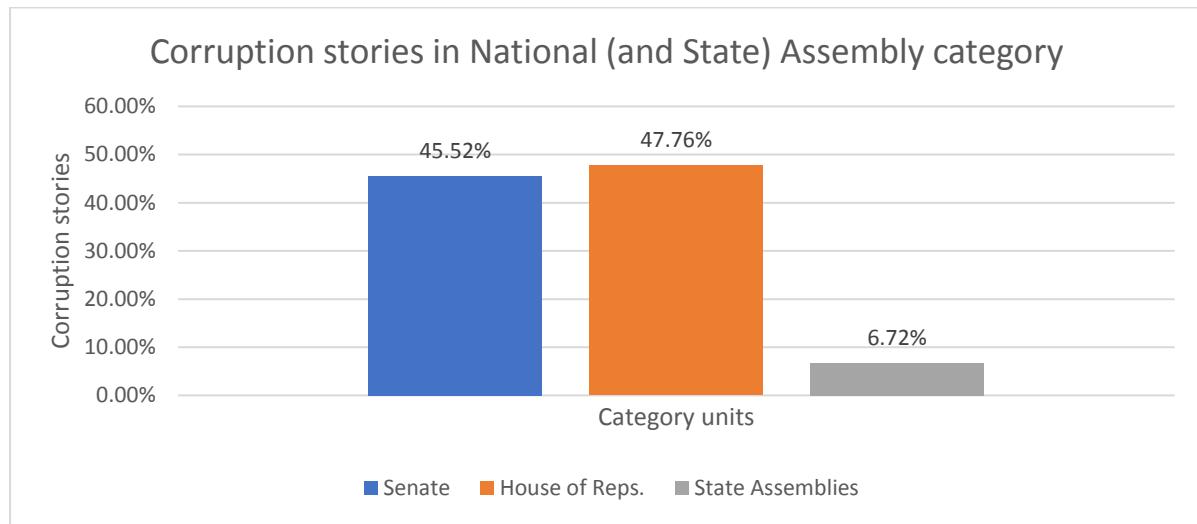
Notes: EFCC: Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. ICPC: Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission. CCBT: Code of Conduct Bureau/Tribunal

Typically, corruption news from the CCBT has involved false declaration of assets by respective public office holders. For example, during 2011, *Daily Trust* reported that the CCBT was investigating a former Governor of Lagos State, Mr Bola Tinubu for operating 15 illegal foreign accounts.

(c) National (and State) Assembly (NA) Category:

In addition to anti-corruption agencies, national and state parliaments also generated substantial corruption stories coded into the NA category, comprising the Senate and House of Representatives, the two chambers of the federal parliament, as well various state assemblies in the country. These add up to just about ten percent (9.96%) of overall sample. Within the NA category itself however, corruption stories generated by the Senate and the House are evenly distributed as Table 5.4 below shows. This implies that corruption stories are as much likely to be sourced from Senate investigations as from investigations in the House. By contrast however, only 6.72% of the category total were attributed to respective Houses of Assembly in the states. This is surprising, considering that there are 36 states and only one federal government in the country. Yet, only a handful of the states were represented in the distribution, implying either that there is less corruption in the states than in the federal government, or that state assemblies are as not as active in investigating corruption as the federal parliament. But it could well be an indication of centralization in the country's political and media systems. Among the earliest stories of corruption coded in 2001 was a N2bn contract scandal at the Ministry of Power, involving then Minister, Bola Ige (now late) and the Permanent Secretary. The case got into the news through investigations by the Senate arising from petitions submitted to it. This set the pattern for many subsequent investigations of corruption by either chamber over the study period, including investigation of corruption within the National Assembly itself.

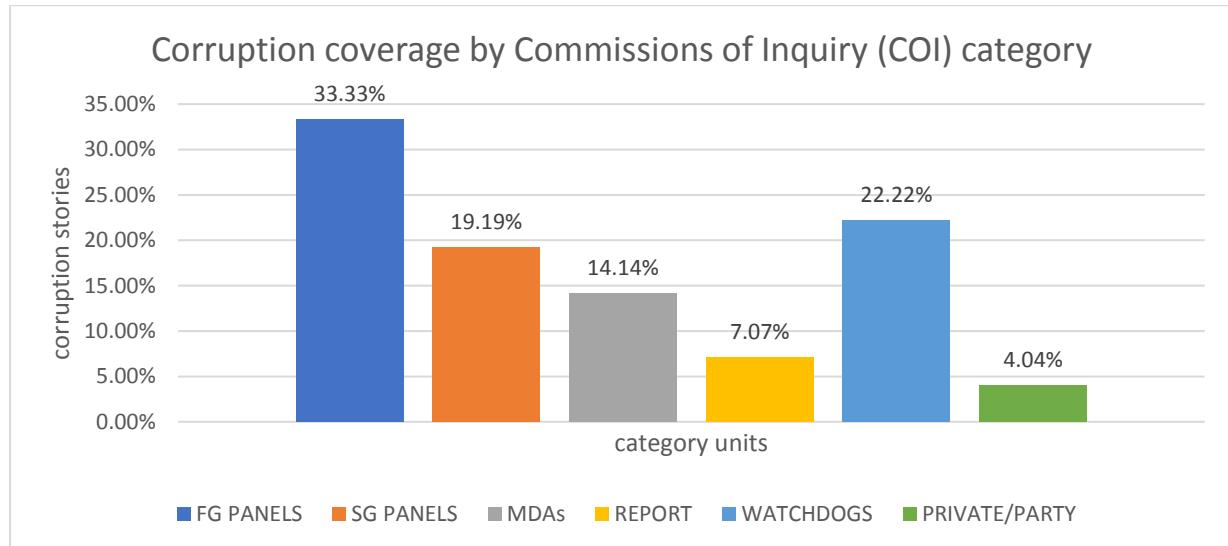
Figure 4.5: Corruption stories in the National (and State) Assembly (NA) category



(d) Commissions of Inquiry (COI) Category:

In Nigeria during the sample period, many cases of corruption were initiated by open or closed investigations of ad-hoc commissions of inquiry, administrative or probe panels, which then generate news of corruption in the press. Such panels were mostly established by the federal and state governments, or ministries, agencies and departments (MDAs). Often the investigations are by regulatory agencies or watchdog bodies of public or private institutions, and even political parties probing party officials over party finances. Combined, these sources make up 7.36% of the total corruption coverage. Thus, such panels were also significant sources of news of corruption in the newspapers. Moreover, within the COI category itself, exactly one-third of its total (33.33%) were from various presidential panels and commissions of inquiry, the largest subcategory. For example, in 2001, *Thisday* reported news of a \$1.24m contract fraud discovered by a presidential panel on National Airspace Management Authority (NAMA). Similar panels in several states generated additional corruption stories, which reinforces the assumption that state institutions of accountability are more active at the federal level than at the states

Figure 4.6: Distribution of corruption stories sourced from Commissions of Inquiry (COI) category



Notes: FG Panels: Panels of Inquiry on corruption set up by the Federal Government. SG Panels: Commissions of Inquiry on corruption set up by respective state governments. MDAs: Panels of Inquiry on Corruption set up by various Ministries, Departments and Agencies of the Federal or State governments directly. Report: Reports of various government agencies about corruption quoted or cited in the newspapers. Watchdogs: Watchdog organizations revealing cases of corruption in Nigerian newspapers, e.g NIETI. Private/Party: Commissions of Inquiry on corruption set up by private organizations or political parties.

(e) Other Category:

As noted in chapter three, stories coded under Other category are an amalgam of corruption scandals which do not readily fit into any of the initial categories (IMI, ACA, NA, COI, FM, DOM). Yet, they are reports of specific instances of corruption involving specific persons and reported for the first time in the press, unlike the NC and FS stories. As such, the sources from which corruption news in this category were attributed vary widely, from police, courts, and whistle blowers to civil society organizations and even foreign governments or organizations, as different from foreign media. In all, a total of 115 corruption stories or 8.55% of the total were coded in this category.

Within this category, whistle blowers generated the highest number of corruption stories with 41.74% of total stories in the OTHER category. However, the operational understanding of whistle blowers in this specific sense is broad ranging, encompassing individuals and groups through whom news of corruption gets to the press either through press conferences, leaks or other means. They range from sitting political office holders blowing the whistle on various corrupt practices of their predecessors or colleagues in other agencies, other politicians, businessmen with connections to politicians, opposition figures and parties, aggrieved collaborators, activist civil society organizations and individuals. For example, on 24 September 2003, *The Guardian* reported that newly appointed Minister, Nasir El-Rufai had alleged that two senators had demanded N50m bribe from him to enable his 'swift' confirmation by the senate. Thus, most of these stories cannot be said to be whistle blowing in the proper sense of the term, since it involves individuals who mostly have their own specific political motivations, rather than public good. In all the 48 stories coded under the whistle blower subcategory, only two were instances of whistle blowing by private citizens, one of them a prominent lawyer for the EFCC; although a few more were by activist civil society NGOs.

Also, other Nigerian newspapers and broadcast media were quoted to have reported one or other corruption stories in the sample, amounting to 6.96% of the total 115 stories in this category. News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), a state-owned agency, *Newswatch*, a leading news magazine in Lagos, *Leadership*, an Abuja-based daily, and *Channels TV* etc were among the local media quoted. This implies remediation of corruption stories investigated or exclusively reported by media other than those in the sample. Sometimes, cases of corruption go straight to the courts from where they are then reported by the newspapers or are revealed by the police directly. For example, on 24 April 2005,

The Punch reported that a court in Lagos heard that a ministerial nominee and two others were standing trial in N21m bribery scam. Similarly, on 6 June 2001, *The Guardian* reported that the police have ‘arraigned’ four officials of the Nigerian Airways over N3.5m bribe. Other stories of corruption coded here involve Nigerian officials reportedly under investigation abroad. Such stories are attributed to courts, police, governments or government officials of other countries. One example is investigation and trial of three governors for money laundering by the Metropolitan Police, one of whom Mr James Ibori, former Governor of oil-rich Delta State served term in a London prison. Also, *Daily Trust* (28 September 2007) attributed a front-page story to the UK High Commissioner as saying that the UK government had recovered £34.6 million from three former Governors. Moreover, 7 stories of corruption in other countries, not involving Nigerians, also made front page news. For example, news of corruption against South African President Jacob Zuma, a former Israeli Prime Minister and the UN food for oil corruption scandals in Iraq were among those reported under the ‘foreign corruption’ stories subcategory as shown in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: OTHER sources of corruption stories in the sample

Other Category Sources	Frequency of corruption stories	% of corruption stories
Whistle Blowers	48	41.74%
Other Media	8	6.96%
Police	8	6.96%
Courts	6	5.22%
Foreign Sources	19	16.52%
Foreign Corruption	7	6.09%
Undertermined	19	16.52%
Total	115	100.00%

Notes: Foreign sources refers to corruption stories attributed to non-media sources in other countries for corruption stories involving Nigerian officials, e.g. Metropolitan Police, U.S Government officials, various courts in UK and U.S especially, etc. Foreign corruption refers to

corruption stories reported on the front page but on corruption in countries other than Nigerians and not involving Nigerians at all, e.g. case of Jacob Zuma above.

(f) Foreign Media and Diaspora/Online Media Categories:

In addition to the corruption investigating authorities, a small number of corruption stories was attributed to foreign media and diaspora/online media, accounting for 1.12% and 0.37% of total respectively. All 5 DOM stories were reported by *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* only, and from Nigerian diaspora online media like *Sahara Reporters* (New York), *Elombah.com* (London), *Empowered News Wire* (London), and *Economic Confidential* (London). For example, in 2002, *Daily Trust* cited *Elombah.com* to have reported controversial deals worth over a million dollars in New York involving a son of then President Obasanjo. Thus, the newspapers in the sample do not appear to carry much corruption stories from diaspora online media in their front pages. This is surprising, since online media are very active in uncovering and reporting instances of corruption in Nigeria, the most prominent ones being *Sahara Reporters* and *Premium Times*. These two regularly report breaking stories of corruption in both public and private sectors, and most times with documentary evidence (Dare, 2011: 38). Furthermore, corruption news in the foreign media category (FM) were attributed to a variety of foreign media organizations, including *New York Times*, *Haaretz*, *Reuters*, *Bloomberg*, *The Clarin* (Argentina), *The Age* (Australia), *Die Spiegel* (Germany), *Guardian*, *Financial Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Also included here are diplomatic cable disclosures by *WikiLeaks*. Three items each were attributed to *New York Times* and *Reuters*, while 9 corruption stories in this category were attributed to each of the remaining media in the list above. Also, many of the foreign media stories are those in which Nigerian officials were involved in bribery scandals. For example, in one of the stories, *Bloomberg* was quoted to have reported that U.S firm, Wilbros had offered bribes to Nigerian

officials to be favoured for contract awards. Similarly, a report attributed to *Die Spiegel* is of bribery to Nigerian officials by Julius Berger (a German construction firm operating in Nigeria). Similar stories of bribery to Nigerian officials were attributed to *The Age* (currency printing), *Haaretz* (arms purchase), and *Guardian* (oil and gas contracts). In other words, foreign media serve much the same purpose of information subsidy on news of corruption to the newspapers in the sample, as do state institutions in the fight against corruption within Nigeria.

(g) Independent Media Investigations (IMI) Category:

This is the category into which media investigations of corruption by the newspapers were coded in order to measure how much of total corruption coverage results from investigative reporting, as indicated by our research questions. Thus, as Figure 4.3 above shows, 4.76% of total corruption coverage are investigative reports by the newspapers studied, well below all other categories, except for foreign media and diaspora/online media. I analyse and discuss details of this category in chapters six and seven, where I situate this data in the analysis of investigative reporting in Nigeria as a whole.

4.4 Following and talking corruption in the press:

(a) Follow-up stories:

As mentioned earlier, news reports coded in the FS category are of corruption cases and scandals that have already appeared in the news at least once before, but which are still current in the news, mostly through additional dimensions of the same scandal, such arrests, trials and convictions of officials involved in the scandals or their denials and refutations in the press concerning allegations of corruption. It is remarkable that corruption stories in this category are the largest in the overall distribution making up 28.48% of the total. This implies that

one in four front page news reports of corruption in the newspapers is likely a story of an ongoing corruption scandal, rather than breaking news of corruption. Furthermore, all follow-up stories derive from routine coverage of corruption scandals initiated by other categories or sources such as the anti-corruption agencies, the national and state assemblies, commissions of inquiry, etc, through which news of corruption by various persons got to the press over the selected period. Table 4.5 below shows second layer coding of the stories in the FS category. The table shows that, out of the 383 total corruption stories in this category, 46.21% were on corruption scandals initiated by the three anti-corruption agencies in the ACA category. Of these, the overwhelming majority were on corruption scandals that broke to the news through the EFCC alone.

Table 4.5 Follow-up corruption stories in the sample

Follow-up Corruption Stories	Frequency of Corruption Stories	% of Corruption Stories
Anti-corruption Agencies (ACA)	177	46.21%
National Assembly (NA)	95	24.80%
Commission of Inquiry (COI)	49	12.79%
Foreign Media (FM)	25	6.53%
Other (OT)	37	9.66%
Total	383	100.00%

Also, 24.80% follow-up stories were on corruption scandals that reached the news through investigations or oversight functions of various national and state assemblies in the country over the same period. A further 12.79%, 9.66% and 6.53% of total stories in this category were on corruption cases generated by COI, OTHER and FM categories respectively. In other words, almost all the follow-up stories (93.47%) were about corruption cases generated by the more established institutions in the fight against corruption in the country, that is, the CIAs. However, follow up stories generated by foreign media sources account

for 6.53% of the stories in this category. The IMI category which is the category into which independent media investigations of corruption were coded has no follow-up story. In other words, investigative reporting of corruption elicits little or no follow up stories in the news. Furthermore, about one-third of the follow-up stories (29.24%) were reported as lead stories, close to 31.08% lead stories in the overall distribution⁴³. This implies that the newspapers consider follow-up corruption stories important enough to lead the news of the day. It also implies that the newspapers in the sample tend to keep corruption scandals at the top of their media agenda, since all or most of these follow-up stories could well have been buried in the inside pages or not reported at all. For example, the case of \$4bn corruption against former military Head of State, General Sani Abacha (now late) and his family generated a total 22 follow-up stories by the four newspapers combined over several years. But like many of the corruption stories in the sample, this too was not the product of investigative reporting by the media. News of Abacha's corrupt practices came from a presidential committee set up in 2000 (two years after he died) to investigate and report back to government. Nonetheless, the newspapers prominently reported the findings of the committee. Much the same applies to the case of Halliburton bribery to Nigerian officials for contract which was first reported by *Reuters* and then taken up by the media in Nigeria. In this sample, the Halliburton scandal alone generated 21 FS stories over many months. Many other corruption cases against Governors, Ministers and bank executives were similarly reported over long periods of time. Indeed, the biggest corruption scandals tend to generate the more number of follow-up stories, but most of these scandals were those broken by the corruption-investigating authorities (CIAs). In fact, although there were 64 (4.76% of total) stories of corruption independently investigated by the

⁴³ See Table 4.2 in the preceding chapter.

combined four publications in the sample, not a single follow up story issued from any of these media investigative reports. This is itself a significant point about the extent of investigative reporting in the country. In other words, while the newspapers give front-page prominence to corruption scandals generated by established institutions fighting corruption, independent media investigations of corruption tend to be given one-off reporting. Finally, the FS category also significantly accounts for the annual trend of coverage earlier observed in the preceding section. For example, the two individual years with the highest number of reports on corruption in the sample are 2005 and 2008. But these two years also have the highest number of FS stories. Therefore, FS stories account for 34.83% and 23.71% of total corruption stories in each of the year 2005 and 2008 respectively. Much the same applies to the other years in the ‘golden’ period of corruption coverage (2006, 2007, 2009). In other words, in the years in which corruption stories rise sharply or remain high, it is significantly influenced by the higher number of follow-up stories of ongoing cases of corruption, which in turn, is influenced by the activities of state institutions mandated to fight corruption.

(d) Narratives of corruption:

Like FS category, narratives of corruption stories also help to shore up the overall coverage of corruption news, even though such stories do not refer to any specific instances of corrupt acts by any public officials, such as the reported statement of David Cameron saying that Nigeria is one of two most “fantastically corrupt” countries in the world mentioned previously above. Such stories are also very frequent in this sample, accounting for 25% of the total corruption news coded. This means that one in four front page stories of corruption in Nigerian newspapers is likely to be a general statement about corruption, indicating that Nigerians *talk* a great deal about corruption in their country, even

without any specific instances of it. This is additional indication of the significance of corruption within the country's political culture and helps to explain the prevalence of corruption in the press.

A further implication of this corruption talk is that it complicates measures of corruption in Nigeria, particularly measures of corruption based on perception surveys of citizens and business people, such as the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) annually collated by Transparency International (TI). As Holmes (2015: 36-37) notes, the CPI is an aggregation of perceptual and attitudinal surveys by 'independent institutions specializing in governance and business climate', many of which conduct polls of citizens and business people. Yet, citizens' or business people's perception of corruption could be influenced by media coverage of it and hence may exaggerate or bias data on which such measures of corruption are based. Indeed, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016: 20) suggest that where the press has a degree of freedom and is active in reporting corruption, measures of corruption based on perception surveys may in fact reflect freedom of the press rather than higher levels of corruption⁴⁴. Conversely, Zhu et al (2012) argue that government-controlled media reduces people's perception of corruption in mainland China, and also significantly reduces the negative impact of face to face grapevine news about corruption may have on peoples' perceptions of it. In other words, perceptions of corruption may have as much to do with media coverage of it as its incidence. In this sense, since over half of corruption stories in the media are either repetitions of existing scandals rather than new ones, or not about actual corruption at all, general perceptions of corruption in Nigeria, by Nigerians or others may in fact be inflated and thus skewing its rank on such indices.

⁴⁴ Still, corruption scandals in Nigeria can be mind-boggling, considering the sums involved.

Again, such corruption talk tends to reflect public imaginings of the state itself or the nation at large, by Nigerians as well as others, since the press is both a medium for conveying information as well as a mechanism for identity construction (Gupta, 1995). In his study of corruption and the state in India, for example, the engineer turned anthropologist, Akhil Gupta, advises ethnographers to pay attention to newspapers and other media. His thinking is that these media are as much a source of 'field data' as personal observations and interactions, since, in his words, "representations of the state are constituted, contested, and transformed in public culture" (Gupta, 1995: 385). By 'public culture', he means a site of political and cultural debate conducted through "the mass media, other modes of mechanical production, and the visible practices of institutions such as the state" (ibid). His own observations of bureaucratic corruption in a rural Indian village therefore included close observation of media coverage of it. He finds that "local discourses and practices concerning corruption were intimately linked with the reportage found in vernacular and national English language newspapers" (ibid: 386). Yet this linkage occurs in such a way that corruption itself and the discourses around it, Gupta maintains, enable "people to construct the state symbolically and to define themselves as citizens" in relation to it. Perhaps nowhere is such corruption-talk more apparent and acute than in Nigerian public culture and explains why it takes up 25% of total corruption news in our sample. But a close or discursive engagement with these stories is not the concern of this research.

Chapter Five: Discussion I: Strong watchdogs, weak investigators?

5.1 Introduction:

In the previous chapter, we observed that corruption stories account for over 8% of total front-page news and one-third of total lead stories, implying an average of two stories every week. We also find that about 10% of the sampled newspapers carry multiple corruption stories, that is, two or more corruption on the same front page. Findings for *Daily Trust*, *The Punch*, and *Thisday* are comparatively similar in terms of frequency and prominence at 8.84%, 9.27% and 9.37% of total news coverage respectively for the three papers. *The Guardian*, we find, covers corruption less than the other titles at 5.21%, which is still considerably high, since it implies reporting of corruption on an average once every three weeks throughout the 12-year period⁴⁵, but also given that there are literally hundreds of issues that could make front page news over the period. Over time, we find steady increases and significant variations between one year and the next, to the extent that 62.30% of all corruption stories were reported during 2005-2009. Corruption stories also vary significantly between the categories. Follow up and narrative of corruption stories account for more than half the total corruption coverage (54.28%), while stories of actual corruption or scandals make up 45.72% of the total. In addition, most of the scandals were generated by the investigations and reports of corruption-investigating-authorities, such as anti-corruption agencies, national and state assemblies, adhoc commissions of inquiries etc. These sources, we observed, account for 39.48% of all corruption coverage, and for most of the scandal stories. Investigative reporting of corruption by the four newspapers contribute

⁴⁵ The Guardian alone has a total of 249 corruption stories. This gives average of $(249/624) \times 3 = 1.19$.

just 4.76% of all corruption news, indicating a low investigative output. Finally, investigative reports of corruption tend to have little or no follow-up stories, unlike corruption stories generated by established sources. In this chapter, I examine these key findings in light of existing research and offer an interpretation of what they mean for watchdog journalism in the context of Nigeria's democracy.

5.2 Situating press coverage of corruption in Nigeria:

Two broad strands are discernible in the emerging literature on press coverage of corruption in Nigerian newspapers. One set of researchers consider the press as active in reporting corruption as part of its watchdog function as demonstrated by “front page headlines” on corruption (Sowunmi et al, 2010: 13-16) or media investigations of “high profile cases of corruption” (Alikor et al, 2013: 47-49; Olaiya et al, 2013: 53). These studies appear consistent with some of the findings here, although the distinction between coverage of corruption in general and investigative reporting is important. However, Iwokwagh and Batta (2011: 337-338) find “only a negligible percentage” of corruption stories in a sample of four Nigerian newspapers “receiving high prominence on the front page” (*ibid*). This is not consistent with our findings as described above. Iwokwagh and Batta may have overgeneralized findings of a small sample taken from a single year (2010)⁴⁶, rather than a trend as Figure 4.2 (chapter 4) shows. A second trend of research finds some influence of ethnic and regional politics or “regional parallelism” (Yusha'u, 2010a) on press coverage of corruption in ways that favours politicians from the south, or south west against those from other regions (Alozieuwa, 2012: 384-386; Jibo and Okoosi-Simbene, 2003: 181-

⁴⁶ They analysed a total of 196 editions of *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* selected by an interval of 4 days apart, over the period 1 May to 31 December 2010. They conclude that all four newspapers “gave low or weak prominence to issues of corruption since majority of the stories were buried in the inside pages, rather than in the front or back pages” (Iwokwagh and Batta, 2011: 337).

184; Ojo, 2003: 835-836). So that “reporting of corruption takes on an ethnic and regional dimension, with each section of the country and its media trying hard to reveal the atrocities of the other” (Yusha’u, 2010a: 359). However, our long-term trend analysis suggests two considerations for caution in reaching such conclusions. First, most of the evidence cited by these studies tend to be the same few or select cases, which can hardly justify a trend. Secondly, there is little evidence of ethnic or regional bias for or against officials involved in the scandals, at least to the extent that quantitative analysis can measure such things. For example, one of the most widely reported scandals in the press was the case involving former IGP Balogun, a southerner. This case alone accounts for 22 follow-up stories, mostly by the three ‘southern’ newspapers in the sample. Much the same applies for corruption cases involving two southern governors. Furthermore, the majority of the scandals involved a *collection* or *group* of politicians and businessmen drawn from different parts of the country, rather than individual officials from any single region.

Coverage of corruption is often understood as scandal reporting, that is, corruption news as mediated scandals. Theodore Lowi (1988) defines scandals simply as “corruption revealed” in the media (in Tumber and Waisbord, 2004a: 1032). Some researchers suggest that corruption scandals tend to be more emphasized in the press than others like sexual scandals or celebrity scandals (Kantola and Vesa, 2013; Schudson, 2004) because such scandals are fundamentally about uses and abuses of power (Thompson, 2000: 241). But studying corruption scandals is about understanding the conditions for exposing corruption in the press, rather than analysis of corruption itself (Tumber and Waisbord, 2004a: 1034), because scandals are inconceivable without media publicity (Jacobsson and Lofmarck, 2008: 209; Waisbord; 2004a: 1077). In addition to publicising scandals however, Clemente and Gabbioneta (2017: 1)

hold that the media also *frames* them in ways that shape public perceptions of both the wrongdoing exposed and the officials or institutions involved. The watchdog function, then, is the inherent assumption of these studies: exposure of corruption in turn instigates resignations or policy reforms (Tumber and Waisbord, 2004b: 1144). Some researchers hold that corruption scandals are symptoms of a ‘crisis of democracy’ manifested in the rise of ‘scandal politics’, or as consequence of structural and technological changes in the media itself, particularly media competition (Jacobsson and Lofmarck, 2008; Adut, 2004; Tumber, 2004; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004a; 2004b; Thompson, 2000). Suphachalasai (2005), for example, regards media competition as a more important factor in reducing corruption than press freedom. Furthermore, Chalaby (2004) argues that investigative reporting and revelations of corruption in the French press arose in the 1990s due to fierce competition between newspapers following withdrawal of government subsidy and decline of literary journalism. Indeed, Hamilton (2016) thinks of investigative reporting as “product-differentiation” for beating or staying above the competition in media markets. Similarly, Waisbord (1994) argues that, the increase in journalistic exposes of corruption in Argentina in the 1990s is part of the rise of scandal politics and media sensationalism for attracting audiences, and by implication advertising revenue. How then, does media competition explain coverage of corruption in Nigerian newspapers? Hardly, I suggest. Media competition implies exclusivity of reporting, as Hamilton (2016) contends above. In short, media competition as a driver of corruption coverage implies investigative reporting or some measure of exclusiveness in sourcing the stories, to distinguish one paper’s reporting from that of others. But for scandals in the Nigerian press, our data shows a convergence in all these criteria.

One explanation is the *routine* process of reporting corruption in the newspapers. We have seen that 39.48% of corruption stories and indeed, most of the scandals as well as their follow up stories were initiated by corruption-investigating agencies such as anti-corruption agencies, congressional investigations of corruption, commissions of inquiry on corruption, etc. These stories reach the media through normal or routine reporting practices and processes, rather than through investigative reporting of corruption independently initiated by the press. In a conversation with me, INTWEE 28, for example, said that investigations of corruption are disclosed to the media through the Commission's regular press releases, monthly and sometimes weekly media briefings, as well as what she calls "operatives' leakages" in which field agents investigating corruption cases often informally leak stories to the press, that is, outside of official communications channels of the commission. This is confirmed by several reporters who mentioned 'press release', 'spokesmen' etc when referring to the EFCC. Also, speaking of the investigations of corruption by houses of the national assembly, INTWEE 12 says that:

There has been a lot of investigative resolutions, we call them resolutions or motions, brought by members, and most of the times, you hardly see such kinds of motions dropped. You hardly see a member objecting to such kinds of investigative motions... And each time there are such kinds of stories, no newspaper house will drop such stories, no newspaper will overlook such kinds of stories... All media houses, both newspapers and even electronic media give such type of stories prominence

The indication is that major sources of corruption news such as anti-corruption agencies, the national assembly etc are also beats to which reporters are assigned and who then report news of corruption generated by these sources through official channels like press releases, briefings and so on. But *The*

Guardian differs from the other three publications in its amount coverage because, as INTVWEE 5 explains:

The Guardian is a business-oriented newspaper. They mostly carry the stories that they think the corporate world wants to hear. Analysis of government, in-depth reports of complicated government policies, and policies in particular that have relevance for the business world and things like that. So, to that extent they under report small cases of sleaze and corruption and things like that.

Similarly, INTVWEE 7 claims that: "For *The Guardian*, they do not have reputation for reports like this [corruption stories]. This is not their sphere traditionally". Still, that 5.21% of its total front-page news coverage is devoted to corruption stories alone suggests that *The Guardian* is not much of an outlier from the rest. Thus, media competition might not fully explain press coverage of corruption in Nigerian newspapers at least.

However, corruption itself and press coverage of it are said to be linked to democratization and democratic development. That is, processes of democratic transition can trigger an increase in corruption in the period immediately following authoritarian rule, while at the same time enhancing disclosures of it. Sindzingre (2002: 446) argues that authoritarian political cultures such as impunity or disregard for rule of law remain entrenched in a new democracy despite formal democratic structures and institutions that come with transition. In this sense, as Weyland, 1998: 112 contends, democratic transition increases the number of political actors who may demand pay-offs and bribes, or act with impunity with public resources. Paradoxically however, transition also creates conditions for detecting and publicizing corruption in the media due to impact of democratic processes and institutions such as political competition, pressure to maintain legitimacy, proliferation of media outlets and increased press freedom, however weak these may be in a new democracy (Tumber and Waisbord, 2004a: 1035). For example, Kramer (2013: 60) finds a marked

increase in Indonesian press coverage of corruption caused by freedom of information legislation and proliferation of new media outlets after the fall of Suharto regime. Nigerian democratization has similarly enhanced both detection of corruption and disclosure by the press. For example, in his inaugural speech marking the return to democracy in 1999, then newly elected President Olusegun Obasanjo described corruption as “the greatest single bane of our society today”. He criticised the military for not doing enough to check corruption and regarded the fight against it in the new dispensation as a “dividend of democracy”.⁴⁷ This informed the establishment of the two anti-corruption agencies (ICPC in 2000; EFCC in 2004) which have investigated literally hundreds of corruption cases and reports, which in turn helped in generating a substantial amount of corruption news⁴⁸. Moreover, political competition between parties and individuals, a consequence of the new democratic politics, also influenced coverage of corruption in the press, for example during elections, as we discuss below. Add to these, the proliferation of new media outlets in the country, following transition to democracy (Ciboh, 2007), particularly as this coincides with the rise of diaspora online media such as *Sahara Reporters* which regularly investigates and publishes corruption stories in the country (Dare, 2011). In other words, the general atmosphere of democratization in terms of free competition, legitimacy and free expression for both the media and other actors help to explain coverage of corruption in Nigerian media too. However, I argue that to the extent that processes and institutions of democratization influence coverage of corruption in the Nigerian press, these need to be understood within the framework of an older and more

⁴⁷ Olusegun Obasanjo (1999), Inaugural Speech at Eagle Square, Abuja, May, 29, 1999. Available at <http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/speech/inaugural.html>

⁴⁸ Even the Code of Conduct Bureau, the third anti-corruption agency in Nigeria established in 1979, was a consequence of the short-lived Second Republic (1979-1983) democratic transition, following a period of 13 years of military rule in the country (1966-1979).

entrenched political culture of ‘war against corruption’ which explains both the political behaviour of the media and of the CIAs in reporting corruption.

5.3 Anti-corruption as political culture in Nigeria:

According to Adebawo and Obadare (2011b: 191), “corruption and its discourse in Nigerian public life are central to the country’s political history”. Indeed, Nigeria has been ‘fighting corruption’ throughout its hundred-year history. For example, Lord Lugard, the colonial administrator who formed Nigeria in 1914 insisted to the leaders of his new territory that prevailing practices such as “abuses, extortionate demands from the peasantry, corruption and bribery in the courts, arbitrary imprisonment and forced labour” (in Tignor, 1993:177-178) would henceforth be “forbidden” in colonial government. In short, Tignor (1993: 177) reasons that explorers, missionaries, merchants and colonial administrators in Africa all believed, to varying degrees, that African traditional political systems were ‘oppressive’, ‘disorderly’, and ‘corrupt’. In this discursive representation of Africa, ‘corruption’ implies the wider Aristotelian sense of a deviation from an ideal in both politics and ethics (Mulgan, 2012: 29-30), the ideal in this case being the norms of governance in the European motherland. But Ekeh (1975: 95-97) calls such representations of Africa at the onset of colonialism as ‘colonial ideologies of legitimization’, in which colonialism itself was extolled and justified as a revival against degeneration of the old ways, and as a reform of the corrupt order that the African past represented.

But if at inception colonialism aimed to reform Nigeria of its ‘corruption’, colonial administration proper soon tolerated it. As some researchers have noted, corruption, in its narrower sense of the use of public office for private gain, was rife in colonial administration itself (Ogunyemi, 2016; Ogbeidi, 2012; Pierce, 2006; Osoba, 1996; Tignor, 1993; Ekpo, 1979, etc). Tignor (1993: 176) for

example believes that a substantial amount of various forms of corruption, including bribery, nepotism and self-enrichment through public office, did exist under colonial rule and were documented by colonial officials. Also, in his analysis of archival documents, Ogunyemi (2016: 68) finds 26 different instances of “embezzlement and misappropriation” by various officials totalling over £25,000 between 1950 and 1960 alone. While the top echelons of colonial administration were generally exempt from such corrupt practices, they looked the other way when officials in the lower cadres of the administration engaged in them (Ogunyemi, 2016: 73; Tignor, 1993: 178). Indirect Rule, devised to accentuate shortage of colonial manpower depended on local chiefs who ruled through provincial ‘Native Authorities’. Challenging these local chiefs for their corruption risked upturning the colonial cart altogether.

Moreover, if ideas about corruption and anti-corruption were formative aspects of the Nigerian state during colonialism, decolonization was the real political moment of the emerging anti-corruption culture in Nigerian politics during which its three key features took hold in Nigerian politics to this day and by which we explain press coverage of corruption as observed above. First, corruption suddenly moved to the top of the political agenda in Nigeria and has remained there ever since. Second, decolonization marked the beginning of official probes and investigations into corruption, a tendency that has been a central feature of virtually all Nigerian governments since then. Third, and the consequence of the first two, corruption became a central feature of media agenda from this period onwards. It is a combination of these interconnected factors that I refer to here as political culture of anti-corruption in Nigeria. First, Tignor (1993: 175) notes that as decolonization began in earnest after World War II, official concerns about corruption emerged from the shadows of secret memos to mainstream colonial policy to, in his words, “slow down” the transfer

of power to then growing strata of educated Nigerians, or nationalists as they are known, who were agitating for independence. To demonstrate this concern about corruption, the colonial government set up the first commission of inquiry, headed by Bernard Storey, then Town Clerk of Norwich, to 'investigate' and 'probe' corruption in the Lagos City Council in 1953⁴⁹. Storey's report was damning and widely publicised in the newspapers of the time. But for Tignor, the "50-page document established a precedent by becoming the first of a series of public airings of Nigerian corruption - the opening salvo in a campaign to publicise bribery, nepotism, and venality as Nigeria's most pressing political ailment" (ibid: 186). At the same time however, the nationalists turned colonialist' discourse of corruption on its head. In their public speeches, rallies, pamphlets and newspaper and magazine writings, they presented colonialism as the ultimate corruption, the root of all evils itself. Moreover, these nationalists targeted specific instances of corruption in the native authorities and exposed them as illustration of the corruption that was the colonial government in its entirety. Pearce (2006: 893) contend that by the early 1950s, speeches and proceedings in the three regional legislative assemblies, and the national one in Lagos were devoted to railing against corruption in the native authorities. Anti-corruption, in this sense, then, was a central mobilizing force against the incumbent colonial power by their nationalist challengers, and as we shall see, not for the last time in Nigeria. Gupta (1995) makes a similar observation in the earlier case of India, that the "discourse of accountability" played a significant role there. But the nationalists made even more charges of corruption against political opponents in the scramble to replace colonial officials. Indeed, the Storey report was instigated by local politicians who were defeated in the Council elections of that year (Tignor, 1993: 186-87). Ekeh (1975:

⁴⁹ By 1953, the Lagos City Council was largely run by Nigerian elected officials.

96) calls these discourses of anti-colonialism and anti-corruption ‘invented’ by the emergent African elites to *replace*⁵⁰ the colonizers ‘African bourgeoisie ideologies of legitimization’. Official investigations and public enquiries soon became a norm, practiced throughout the country well before independence in 1960. Findings of these enquiries were then eagerly reported in the local press (Olukotun, 2004; Osoba, 1996) and presented corruption as the single most important issue in a post-independent Nigeria (Tignor, 1993: 187).

Yet, corruption flourished extensively during the first independent government (1960-1966) and spelled its collapse (Ogunyemi, 2016; Ogbeidi, 2012; Osoba, 1996; Ekpo, 1979). The soldiers who staged the first military coup proclaimed corruption, defined liberally to include bribery, nepotism, favouritism, ethnicity and sundry vices, as a major reason why they intervened. As their leader Major Nzeogwu stated on the night of the coup (15 January 1966):

Our enemies are the political profiteers; the swindlers; the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10%; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, or VIPs at least; the tribalists; the nepotists; those that have made the country look big for nothing before international circles; those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian calendar back by their words and deeds (in Ekpo, 1975: 163)

In other words, corruption is here presented as a major factor in military’s intervention in Nigerian politics, much the same way as colonial administrators and nationalist politicians had done previously. Successive military regimes then ruled the country from 1966-1979, and again from 1983-1999, each predicated on the same discourse of corruption. The 1983 coup, which marked the collapse of the Second Republic civilian government (1979-1983) was singularly

⁵⁰ Italics in the original. Ekeh sees ideologies as false representations invented to acquire power, first by the colonizers and later by the African elite who sought to replace them. For him, both groups lack sufficient legitimacy and hence recourse to these ideologies (See Ekeh, 1975: 93-94).

explained as an attempt to rid the country of the corruption of the civilians. This government immediately launched a slate of anti-corruption decrees and military tribunals which in turn summarily tried and convicted top politicians for corruption and sentenced many of them to long stretches of prison terms, in some cases up to 120 years. In addition to these, it set up a military agency then known as War Against Indiscipline (WAI) to fight corruption in the wider society (Ogbeidi, 2012: 8). But even before this, previous military governments had established anti-corruption agencies and commissions of various hue, notably the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) in 1975 which conducted extensive investigations into the civil service and sacked literally hundreds of senior bureaucrats for corruption (Ciboh, 2014: 59). Yet, by all accounts, military governments were no less corrupt than their civilian counterparts, if not more so (Agbiboa, 2013; 2012; Ogbeidi, 2012; Ikpe, 2000). Olukotun (2002a; 2000a) notes that popular discontent against corruption in military governments was a major factor in civil society mobilization and struggle for democracy, and by implication, regime change in 1999. Throughout Nigeria's political history then, various governments have initiated different legislations, institutions, decrees, policies, and programmes, including media policy and legislation, for fighting corruption (Agbiboa, 2012; Omotola, 2006)⁵¹.

Elkins and Simeon (1979: 127) say of political culture that "it consists of assumptions about the political world". These assumptions, Elkins and Simeon continue, are in general, collectively held among members of a country, for

⁵¹ Between 1999 to date alone, Nigeria has had more than a dozen legislations, rules, executive orders and anti-corruption agencies, not to mention, literally hundreds of official commissions of inquiries- all against corruption. Some of these agencies include EFCC, ICPC, CCBT, Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), Debt Management Office (DMO), Budget Management and Planning Unit (BMPU) or Due Process Office as it is called, Treasury Single Account (TSA), and of course regulatory agencies of various industries in the public and sectors. Some are public campaign programmes like National Orientation Agency (NOA), Service Compact (Servicom), etc. These are all government initiatives at eradicating corruption in Nigeria since 1999. Many more have been launched in the past.

example, and function, among other things, to focus attention on “identifying the problems deemed pertinent” (ibid). In this sense, for them, political culture closely approximates a “mind set” through which leaders and citizens alike approach politics by “limiting attention to particular problems and solutions” to the neglect or exclusion of others. Therefore, my argument here is that ‘anti-corruption’ has long been entrenched in Nigerian political culture, but with the onset of democratization over the longest stretch ever in Nigeria, this tendency has renewed vigour and free expression. This is manifested in the hundreds of official investigations and reports of corruption which then generate the bulk of corruption stories in the press. Following Elkins and Simeon (1979) above, I refer to this persistent attention to corruption in Nigeria as an aspect of its political culture, not only in politics, but also in the wider society, which I illustrate briefly below.

Ekpo (1979: 161) observes that “there are few issues in contemporary Nigeria that have received as much attention in the comments of public officials, in newspaper and magazine articles, and in speeches of prominent citizens, as that of corruption in public life”. Similarly, Tignor (1993: 175) observes straightforwardly that “no country in Africa has devoted more attention and energy to continuing allegations of corruption than Nigeria”. Both authors wrote decades ago, but even today, such ‘attention’ to the issue of corruption in public life by public officials and prominent citizens dominates Nigerian politics and media. In fact, that 25% of total coverage of corruption comprises what Nigerian leaders and others *say* about corruption or its reform, rather than *actual* instances of corruption, is, by itself, a significant indication of how strongly issues of corruption are viewed in Nigerian political culture. Indeed, few issues hold media and popular imagination in Nigeria than corruption. For example,

Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966)⁵² is said to be a model of 'national literature' in Nigeria because it has inspired others of its kind even in many Nigerian local languages (Sullivan, 2001: 79). But *A Man of the People* is a novel about corruption in Nigerian social and political life. In fact, major Nigerian works of literary and cultural production like poems (Bamikunle, 1995), Nollywood movies (Abah, 2009; Haynes, 2006) are about the theme of corruption, including the acclaimed novel *Welcome to Lagos* by Chibundu Onuzu, published earlier this year⁵³. Even non-fiction books written by foreigners about Nigeria, especially by diplomats, scholars and foreign correspondents who have worked or served in the country tend to be wholly or partly about corruption⁵⁴. Thus, the various examples above illustrate the centrality of corruption in general political, social and cultural life in Nigeria. Hence, it is not entirely surprising that Nigerian newspapers will give corruption such prominence on their front pages, to the extent that nearly 10% of editions carry two or more corruption stories.

Moreover, corruption is also a major topic of discussion among Nigerians in various social contexts: at work, school, queues, journeys, and virtually social gatherings of any kind. Anthropologists, journalists and other observers have been repeatedly struck by the extent to which Nigerians talk about corruption and imagine every social and economic condition in the country through it, even if they find themselves implicated in it in their everyday life (Agbiboa, 2016⁵⁵;

⁵² Chinua Achebe (1966) *A man of the people*, Oxford: Heinemann African Writers Series

⁵³ Chibundu Onuzu (2017), *Welcome to Lagos*, Faber and Faber

⁵⁴ Recent examples include Karl Maier (2002) *This house has fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*, Oxford: Westview Press; John Campbell (2012) *Nigeria: Dancing on the brink*, Council on Foreign Relations Books; Richard Bourne (2015) *Nigeria: A new history of a turbulent century*, London: Zed Books; Stephen Ellis (2016) *This present darkness: A history of Nigerian organized crime*, London: Hurst & Company

⁵⁵ Agbiboa was in fact reviewing a recent children's novel *Gbabga* by a Nigerian author which explores the theme of corruption through the eyes and experiences of a Nigerian child. Agbiboa (2016) 'A child's eye view of corruption', Africa at LSE blog, available at <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2016/05/27/a-childs-eye-view-of-corruption/> [accessed 10 June, 2017].

Smith, 2010; 2007; Tignor, 1993; Wraith and Simpkins, 1963). Our argument therefore is that in such a political and social setting, where corruption is perceived as dominating *the system* (Gupta, 1995), newspapers are likely to give emphasis to corruption stories. But journalists, too, are not exempt. For example, the weeks of my newsroom observation at *Daily Trust* in Abuja coincided with a major corruption scandal in the news at the time, involving then newly elected President of the Senate, Dr Bukola Saraki, who according to the Code of Conduct Bureau, had falsified his assets declaration forms when he became Governor of Kwara State back in 2003⁵⁶. I observed that the reporters took a keen interest in news of the scandal, followed it on TV and in other newspapers, and talked about it almost everywhere on the premises of the paper. As INTVWEE 18 observes:

One, corruption stories sell in Nigeria. The media has come to know that Nigerians want to know that their leaders are stealing, even when they are not stealing. It's a story that people want to read and it's a survival way of making money by the media itself. So that is one way of looking at that.

This statement points to much of the foregoing discussion about how important corruption issues are to the reading public in Nigeria. Newspapers give prominence to corruption stories because it matters to Nigerians, and it matters to Nigerians because corruption has *always* mattered in Nigerian political culture, as we have seen above.

⁵⁶ See Festus Owete and Richard Akinwumi (2015), 'Inside the N10bn Saraki Declared as Governor', *Premium Times*, 20 October (<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/191783-exclusive-inside-the-n10billion-assets-saraki-declared-as-governor.html>).

5.4 Political culture and information subsidy in coverage of corruption:

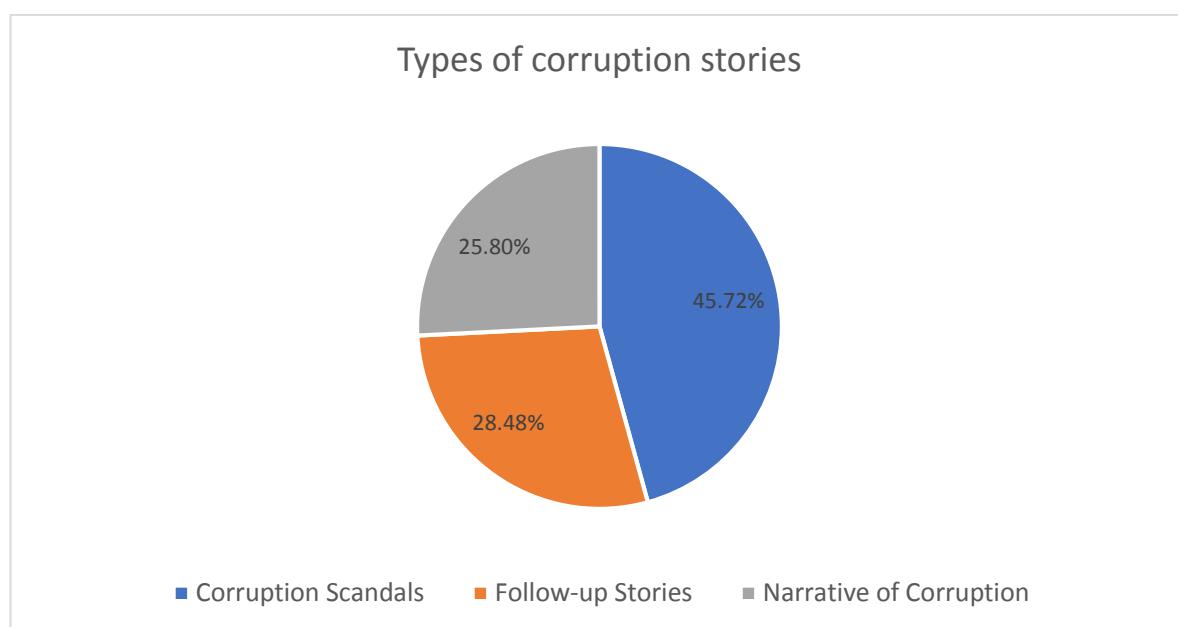
Classical research on the relationships between journalists and their sources as either ‘consensual’, or ‘adversarial (Ciboh, 2017: 186; Jackson and Moloney, 2016: 763-764; Tiffen et al, 2014: 375-376; Davis, 2009: 205-206; Örebro, 2002: 21). An influential version of this classical account is Gandy’s (1982) idea of “information subsidies” in which sources, particularly public relations sources subsidize the costs of news production for journalists through press releases, lobby, briefings etc and thus enhance the profitability of the news media (Lewis et al, 2008a: 2). More recent research on information subsidy is concerned with the increasing over-reliance of journalists on public relations and other elite sources for the much of the news the public consumes, and the potential of this to undermine both independent journalism and the democratic promise of the press. This concern is often expressed by a variety of labels like ‘information subsidy’, ‘passive journalist’ ‘churnalism’, ‘public relations democracy’, ‘crisis’, etc (Jackson and Moloney, 2016; Franklin, 2011; Reich, 2010; Davies, 2009; Lewis et al, 2008a; 2008b; O’Neill and O’Connor, 2008; Bro, 2008; Davis, 2000). For example, Lewis et al (2008a; 2008b) hold that as staff strengths and other resources shrink while demand for news rises, journalists are increasingly relying on “pre-packaged” news material mostly from public relations and agency copies. Their analysis of 2207 news stories from five British national dailies finds evidence of “independent journalism” in just 12% of the sample (ibid, 2008: 15). Also, based on similar data and insider-perspective, *Guardian* Journalist Nick Davies suggests the rise of “churnalism” in the global media. Moreover, Jackson and Moloney (2016) find that information subsidy has since transformed into editorial subsidy: page-ready material specifically targeted at the media. Similarly, in an innovative engagement with PR practitioners, journalists and the news they produce, an approach designed to reconstruct the news production

process, Reich (2010) finds that the influence of public relations and information subsidy is “richer” and more varied than previous research recognizes. Public relations people successfully build their agenda in 50% of the stories analysed and are involved in one way or another in a further 75% of the news items, through “supplying information, story leads, and even dubiously ‘technical services’” (Reich, 2010: 799). Also, Kioussis et al (2015: 365-366) observe that studies on information subsidy focus predominantly on the news release, particularly election campaign news release and its agenda-building potentials, and occasionally on political advertising, and corporate takeovers (see also Kioussis et al 2006: 267-268). Ciboh (2017) finds that information subsidy is also rife in Nigerian newspapers, but more than that politicians use a combination of “positive (monetary awards) and negative (intimidation and violence)” to elicit or discourage news coverage (*ibid*: 186). In sum then, these studies conceive information subsidy as not only unhelpful for journalism, but also for democracy, or as Franklin (2011: 90-91) put it, information subsidy sources represent a “continuing crisis” for democratic media performance. Our argument here is to the contrary. First, while information subsidy is a useful framework for understanding press coverage of corruption in Nigeria, it does not recognise the nuances of news types subsidized for the press. Lewis et al (2008a: 4-5) based their analysis on all types of “home news”, from politics to the arts and conclude that information subsidy compromises fourth estate role of the press. However, for corruption stories specifically, information subsidy supplied by corruption investigating-agencies may in fact be a necessary condition for more watchdog journalism, especially in a political culture steeped in anti-corruption as Nigeria, as we illustrate below.

(a) Corruption investigating authorities and press coverage of corruption:

In the preceding chapter, we find three types of corruption stories in Nigerian newspapers: corruption scandals, follow up stories and narrative of corruption stories. Scandals are distributed in seven categories according to their sources (IMI, ACA, NA, COI, FM, DOM, OTHER) and together account for 45.72% of total coverage of corruption. Follow stories from these scandals and narrative of corruption stories make up 28.48% and 25.80% respectively. This is represented by Figure 5.1 below which shows the distribution by types of corruption stories in the sample. But for the sake of analysis here, we focus specifically on the scandals to illustrate the extent of information subsidy provided by the CIAs.

Figure 5.1: Types of corruption stories in the Nigerian press:



Notes: Corruption scandals (45.72%) is total frequency of corruption stories in the seven categories (IMI, ACA, NA, COI, FM, DOM, OTHER) combined.

Table 5.1: Frequency of corruption scandals in Nigerian newspapers (n=615)

Categories (sources of corruption stories)	Frequency of Corruption scandals	% of corruption scandals	Corruption Investigating Authorities
Anti Corruption Agencies (ACA)	183	29.76%	
National (and State) Assemblies (NA)	134	21.79%	
Commissions of Inquiry	99	16.10%	
Other (OT)	115	18.70%	86.34%
Independent Media Investigations (IMI)	64	10.41%	
Foreign Media (FM)	15	2.44%	
Diaspora/Online Media (DOM)	5	0.81%	13.66%
Total Corruption Scandals	615	100.00%	100.00%

The second column in Table 5.1 above shows the frequency or number of corruption scandals in each of the seven categories and their combined total, while the last column shows their percentages relative to the total scandals in the sample. This means that the four categories that make up the CIAs (ACA, NA COI and Other) generate a total of 86.34% of breaking stories of real or alleged corruption (scandals), while the remaining 13.66% are generated from foreign media, diaspora/online media and independent media investigations. In other words, CIAs information subsidy for revelations of corruption in the four newspapers is almost 90%. These findings conform to Waisbord's (1997a: 121) observation that powerful sources, individuals or institutions, play a strong role in 'originating' news stories about wrongdoing through a variety of means. Indeed, tips from government sources account for 34.9% of prize-winning investigative stories in U.S journalism (Lanosga and Martin, 2017: 10), and even more significantly, investigative reports triggered by such sources are more likely to result in policy reforms than those resulting from independent journalistic enterprise (ibid: 11). This further indicates that for certain types of stories, for example, corruption stories or investigative reports, information

subsidy may well enhance democratic governance, rather than undermine it, all other things being equal.

(b) CIAs and mandate power:

One reason for this high extent of information subsidy, according to more than two-thirds of the 16 interviewees, is the *mandate power* of the CIAs in comparison to the effective capacity of the press to discover and report corruption in high places. In contrast to the press, the agencies or probe committees are state-level institutions set up by law with the specific mandate of revealing and prosecuting corruption. Therefore, public officials tend to respond to requests for information from the CIAs than they do to journalists. For example, INTWEE 22 says that “if for example, a government institution is probing another one, it has a mandate to compel anybody to appear or to appear with certain documents which even with the freedom of information law, it is difficult for the media to get”. Similarly, INTWEE 9, an editor-in-chief at one of the publications in this study explains that:

So sometimes that is why it is better to rely on the national assembly. If they are investigating a particular issue, you see the newspapers giving it blanket coverage. Why, because that is where the officials cannot easily wriggle out and they are under public scrutiny. And then they are being asked questions by members of the national assembly who have been constitutionally given that power. So, they cannot dodge like if it is a media organization.

These statements exemplify a common theme among the respondents who think that the media’s capacity to investigate corruption does not compare to the CIAs since politicians have more regard for these agencies than the media. But it also reflects the relative lack of institutionalization of freedom of information law, which in principle, should be sufficient to compel public officials to release any information to journalists. But even journalists themselves often find stories from CIAs more reliable than independent sources,

most of whom are described by the respondents as “aggrieved” persons who might mislead reporters into fighting turf battles rather than watchdog journalism. But so too do citizens who supply petitions to anti-corruption agencies or parliament. In fact, INTWEE 4 notes that citizens submit more petitions to anti-corruption agencies than the media because they believe these agencies have more effective power. As INTWEE 4 put it, “but now if EFCC gets information, they go for the person and arrest the person, it makes impact”.

Also, INTWEE 5 observes that:

But usually what you have here is that somebody is aggrieved and he leaks it to a reporter. But on the other hand, if it is police or EFCC or ICPC or NEITI or any of the anti-corruption agencies that discovered it as part of their duties, a corrupt deed, and they reveal to the nation, nothing wrong with that. Or for that matter the parliamentary committees... the parliamentary committee doesn't have to know anybody, they will sit down, they will issue a circular: Perm. Sec come, Director come, you, come. Bring the file. Can I do that as journalist?... And if the media were still there, they will just grab and go to town. Very legitimate. There is nothing wrong with those sources spilling. Actually, we prefer it that way because it is more reliable than a source

This implies that for corruption stories the credibility of the source is perhaps more significant than in other types of news stories, perhaps due to nature of corruption itself and the possible consequences of its exposure, both for the persons alleged to have engaged in corruption, and to the media. Corruption, particularly as understood here in the sense of financial misconduct by persons occupying positions of power and trust, is generally a clandestine activity (Dincer and Johnstone, 2016: 134) and often involves persons with power to fight back (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011b) through intimidation against journalists (Ciboh, 2017). Furthermore, because press disclosures of corruption can ruin reputations and by implication legal troubles for the press where unfounded. All this increase reliance on information subsidy by the CIAs, which in the context of Nigeria's political culture comes in steady supply. As Adut (2008: 145)

observes in his analysis of investigating magistrates in generating corruption scandals in France in the 1990s that “Elites’ accusations are both more salient and credible, with less of a chance of being met with a crushing retribution”. Finally, CIAs make it ‘easier’ for newspapers to report corruption and still maintain their business relationships with corporate advertisers. For example, INTVWEE 23 says that “recently, EFCC arrested three senior officers of a bank. I am the news editor; the story came to me. But I couldn’t use the name of the bank in the headline”⁵⁷. Similarly, INTVWEE 27 explains that:

The newspaper, when they are protecting advertisers would say let it not come from us. But if, from the other hand, the EFCC is taking on the bank, and all the papers know about it, they will now decide what to do. At that point, protecting the bank beyond that stage will mean that the paper is reporting what others are not reporting. So, they will be forced to report it

In other words, because the story emanates from an established government source with a mandate to investigate corruption, newspapers are compelled to report malfeasance even in organizations they would otherwise wish to ‘protect’ for commercial reasons. In effect, then, the above findings indicate that in the context of Nigeria, where the effective capacity of the press is curtailed by several factors, watchdog role of the press with regards to exposing corruption is positively served, rather than harmed, by information subsidy resulting from horizontal accountability functions of state agencies.

(c) Anti-corruption, politics, and news:

We noted earlier that Chalaby (2004) attributed the rise of corruption scandals and investigative reporting in France to competition for market share among newspapers occasioned by withdrawal of government funding. For Adut (2008: 530-32) however, it was the “high-profile corruption investigations by the

⁵⁷ Nigerian newspapers frequently use generic means of identifying organizations, like “a new generation bank”, “a leading telecoms company” and so on, particularly for negative stories such as corruption, bank robbery etc.

French investigating magistrates”, who strove to enforce previously existing but under-enforced anti-corruption laws, by strategically revealing details of their investigations to the press through leaks and other backhanded channels. But the investigating magistrates were “enabled” by certain “structural factors”, notably decentralization of the political system and liberalization of the economy in the late 1980s (ibid). Marchetti (2009) makes a similar argument that these magistrates were driven a mission to promote the independence of the judiciary from the executive which had subordinated the judicial arm for much of the 20th century. Thus, the press then “became a strategic arena for the revelations of this investigations sandwiched in the tensions the political and judicial fields” (ibid: 371). Similarly, Waisbord (1996: 344) argues that because political corruption necessarily involves powerful institutions and individuals in the political system, media scandals are inherently an expression of the conflicts between these actors, “rather than simply the by-product of solitary investigative reporters” as normative theory assumes. Moreover, Dincer and Johnston (2016) suggest that political culture is a determinant of the number and types of corruption issues reflected in the media. In fact, their research is central to my argument about political culture in generating news about corruption that it is worth recounting at length. Dincer and Johnston aim, first, to provide a “new measure” of corruption based not on surveys of how citizens and businesses perceive corruption, or through analysis of conviction rates dominant in U.S studies of corruption (ibid: 135-136). Instead, they measure corruption through a new technique based on quantitative analysis of press coverage of corruption, which they call “Corruption Reflection Index” (CRI)⁵⁸. Secondly, Dincer and Johnston investigate the extent to which varying political

⁵⁸ Barring the statistical analysis and difference of research questions, this technique is strikingly similar to that I used in this research, as I indicated in an earlier note above.

culture in U.S states determine news of corruption, as *reflection* of both corruption itself and of the amount of space media devote to it, which, they argue, in turn reflects its significance within the political culture of the respective states (ibid: 134). Thus, they follow Daniel Elazar's classification of political culture in U.S states into individualistic, moralistic and traditionalist. They then analyse Associated Press news coverage of corruption in those states over 1980-2010. They find that corruption news is higher in traditionalist and individualistic states than in moralistic dominant ones, but higher still in traditionalistic states than in individualistic ones (Dincer and Johnston, 2016: 138). This shows that certain aspects of a country's political culture could well influence how and the amount of corruption reported in that country's press. And while I could not find comparable research on political culture in Nigeria, our argument here is that the tendency, or the general "mind-set" (Elkins and Simeon, 1979) for fighting corruption within Nigerian politics, government and society as an aspect of its political culture that influences press coverage of corruption in the country, as our data shows below. Therefore, taken together, these studies imply that structural factors in the wider political system could in turn influence revelations of scandals through strategic use of the press by certain actors. My point is that similar processes were at play in Nigeria after return to democracy and explains much of the information subsidy for corruption reporting in the newspapers. Democratic transition gave renewed impetus to the anti-corruption political culture in Nigerian governments to make the fight against corruption the centre of policy and governance.

Early on, President Obasanjo (2000) acknowledged all previous governments' attempts at anti-corruption but noted that in most cases, "the cure often turned to be worse than the disease" (in Ciboh, 2014: 59). In response, he promised a

new “crusade” and “total war” on against graft⁵⁹. He severally called for “moral rebirth on corruption”⁶⁰ and insisted that the war against corruption was “necessary for national development”⁶¹. Political activism against corruption by his government, demonstrated first by the establishment of ICPC and EFCC, and subsequently by the high-profile investigations of these agencies during 2003-2005 (and beyond) explain much of the long-term pattern of corruption coverage observed in our sample. It explains the steady increases over time and why there is concentration of corruption stories in a handful of years. As we have seen in Figure 4.2, reports of corruption were at 3.65% of total in 2001, but spiked to 13.23% in 2005, more than four times the rate of 2001. The upsurge is explained by several high-profile investigations by the EFCC and ICPC. For example, during 2003-2004, the ICPC investigated two sitting ministers and several top civil servants over \$240m National Identity Card project bribery scandal involving the French company SAGEM (*The Guardian* 5 December 2003). Adebanwi (2012) observes that by 2005, the anti-corruption war had turned to a media war as corrupt officials “fight back”. INTWEE 7 suggests how this war may have played out in the media, that:

When we started with fraudsters like the 419, the media were very excited because they (fraudsters) didn't own anything (media) and we were celebrated. Then we moved to next level and we started attacking government agencies like the customs, Inland Revenue, etc. It was still okay. Then over next level was to start attacking the politicians. Then the whole shift in momentum began. Why? Because these politicians own the newspapers. That was where the change began. Issues of witch-hunting; that Obasanjo was using it to go after opponents...

Whatever the validity of these claims, the events set the stage for what was to come. As the EFCC continues to investigate corruption and publicize them in the

⁵⁹ *The Guardian*, 23 April 2005

⁶⁰ *The Punch*, 12 February 2001

⁶¹ *Daily Trust*, 24 December 2003.

press, its public profile rose and created a multiplier effect on the other investigating authorities: ICPC, national and state assemblies, and numerous many panels or adhoc commissions of inquiry into corruption by both federal and state governments and their agencies or departments. Moreover, elections, impeachment proceedings against political office holders of all sorts, and changes in leaders or heads of major government establishments became the primary arena for playing out this politics of anti-corruption during this period, which peaked between 2005 and 2009. At least five state governors and several more deputy governors were impeached on corruption charges spearheaded by the EFCC between 2003 and 2007 (National Democratic Institute, 2008: 25). These generated tons of front page corruption stories in the press. Election periods were particularly significant in these processes of exposing corruption. For example, in all three general election years (2003, 2007 and 2011) coverage of corruption increased either in the election year itself or in the year following it, relative to the year before the elections. Campaigns and other political activities generated accusations of malfeasance among incumbents and their challengers and CIAs caught in on the game. Indeed, then Chairman of EFCC announced to a joint session of the National Assembly in late 2006 that the agency had cases of corruption against 31 of the 36 state governors⁶² and urged the legislators to enact a law barring them from holding any political office in the future (National Democratic Institute, 2008: 25), which itself generated more corruption stories in newspapers. As INTWEE 22 claims, “it is not as if these cases are not there before”, but the elections bring such issues to fore as politicians try to “outwit themselves”. This continues even after elections as successors probed the affairs of their predecessors, especially in an electoral

⁶² Under Nigerian constitution, executive heads (president and governors) cannot be charged for corruption while still in office through a provision called constitutional immunity.

system with consistently high turnover rates of elected officials (Hamalai et al, 2017: 246; NDI, 2008: 43). In February 2008, for example, then new president Umaru Musa Yar'adua and Speaker of the House of Representatives Dimeji Bankole separately alleged \$10 billion and \$16 billion corruption, respectively, in the Independent Power Project of the Obasanjo government⁶³. Many such official accusations resulted in a flurry of public hearings and investigations by various CIAs throughout 2008 and beyond.

5.5 The press as strong watchdogs, but weak investigators:

What then is role of the newspapers in these processes and events? If information subsidy accounts for much revelations of corruption in the press, rather than investigative reporting, how should we understand the role of the press in such a context? I argue that newspapers were strong watchdogs but weak investigators, and that the two roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Table 5.1 above shows that just 10.41% of breaking news of alleged cases of corruption results from independent journalism by the four newspapers combined. About 90% are generated through information subsidy supplied by CIAs, foreign media, diaspora/online media etc. this implies that independent journalism about corruption in Nigeria is considerably weak, at least in comparison to investigations and disclosures of corruption through other sources. However, as I discuss in detail in the next two chapters, as compared to other types of news reporting, investigative reporting is considerably low in many media systems. Secondly, in the specific context of corruption stories in Nigeria, low investigative reporting does not necessarily suggest weak Fourth Estate journalism. Or conversely, high information subsidy from established, or to borrow the language of Nigerian journalists themselves as cited above,

⁶³ *The Punch* 1 February 2008; *Daily Trust* 7 February 2008.

‘constitutionally mandated’ sources, does not necessarily compromise fourth estate watchdog journalism. Lewis et al (2008a) conclude their analysis of information subsidy in the British press by suggesting that it compromises the fourth estate role of the media. My argument is that for reporting about corruption, information subsidy may in fact enhance media watchdog role, at least in the specific context of Nigeria’s new democracy where both the political and media systems are only just emerging from long decades of undemocratic rule. The question then is how does the Nigerian media demonstrate a strong or high watchdog journalism even in the face of low investigative reporting of corruption? Findings from the content analysis and interviews suggest that watchdog role of the press is enacted in three ways, which I examine below.

The first point is to establish the key distinction between investigative reporting and watchdog journalism of which the former is a part. Eriksson and Östman (2013: 304) have suggested that watchdog function of the media is ‘enacted’ at two key moments in the production of political news. Journalists demonstrate ‘cooperation’ with politicians at the first ‘interactional’ phase of direct or indirect contacts with politicians during press conferences but tend to be more critical and questioning of the politicians at the second phase of ‘news construction’, that is, in their news reports. Cooperation conforms to the ‘exchange’ model, while criticism and questioning conforms to adversarialism in the relationships between journalists and political sources. In a similar research, Gnisi et al (2014: 112) contend that watchdog journalism and its adversarialism are enacted by Italian journalists in interviews with politicians, particularly during elections. They find that journalists exhibit more ‘toughness’ against candidates leading in the polls when questioning them during interviews. Furthermore, Coronel (2010: 112) argues that watchdog journalism covers a wide range of different types of ‘exposure journalism’, regardless of the

medium, quality, target or 'initiator' of the investigation. In this sense, reporting corruption through information subsidy is still watchdog journalism. Similarly, Mellado (2015: 602) suggests that while investigative reporting is the highest form of watchdog journalism, all news types that involve 'questioning,' 'critique', 'denouncing', 'conflict', coverage of 'trials and processes', 'external research' are also varying degrees of performing the watchdog role. That is investigative reporting is but one aspect of watchdog journalism. Fink and Schudson (2014) and Ekstrom et al (2006) find much the same in the respective cases of American and Swedish journalism. The point of these studies, then, is to illustrate that in practice, watchdog journalism encompasses a wide range of different journalistic activities practices broadly lumped together under the same label of watchdog journalism and which can be performed at several moments of the reporting process. This finer distinction between varying degrees of watchdog journalism is important because as I illustrate below, findings of this study indicate that Nigerian newspapers are relatively strong at doing watchdog journalism even if their independent reporting of corruption is comparably low.

First, as overall coverage of corruption shows above, the newspapers give considerable front page space and prominence to corruption stories. Over 8% of total front-page news coverage is devoted to corruption stories alone, about one third of which are presented as lead stories. Nearly 10% of editions sampled carry two or more corruption stories. Also, all kinds of issues relating to corruption are covered in the newspapers, including actual cases of corruption or general talk about it. In addition, Scandals remain matters of front page importance for long periods, to the extent that follow up stories on scandals constitute the single largest category of corruption news in the sample. But even the narrative of corruption stories, which are general statements about

corruption, rather than particular instances of it, were also widely reported by the press, making up 25.80% of total corruption coverage. A good number of these stories highlight the economic, social and political consequences of corruption in Nigeria, as expressed by Nigerian leaders, leaders of other countries and so on. Also, we find that corruption stories are sourced from a wide range of established sources from independent media investigations to investigations by foreign governments, officials or media. In addition, observations by respondents interviewed broadly confirm these quantitative findings about the extent of press coverage of corruption in the four newspapers. For example, INVTWEE 5 offers a view that conforms to that of several others interviewed, that:

And if EFCC arrest somebody or is investigating somebody, we know that our readers will be interested to know about it. So we follow EFCC or ICPC, or if NEITI discovered that Shell or NNPC or Chevron are not paying the right amount of money into the federation account. Our readers will be interested. So we follow it. Okay. But those institutions, they also know that they need media support for what they are doing because whatever work you are doing in service of the public you want the public to hear... Even the judiciary, they want public to hear about what they are doing because every public institution needs legitimacy from the public

Indeed, INTWEE 7, who has considerable experience of working at one of the anti-corruption agencies, suggested that newspapers generally “supported” their investigations of corruption, even against the will of their proprietors, some of whom are politicians or have close friends among them:

In spite of the attempt to derail our effort as not genuine, as a witch hunt, it still went on successfully and the media especially the reporters understood and supported us, and the ownership on its part fought it seriously... We attacked the interest of Ibrahim Babangida, Atiku Abubakar, Tinubu⁶⁴ and lots more. Luckily for us we succeeded

⁶⁴ Babangida (Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida is a former military head of state (1985-1993) who is widely reputed to have liberalized corruption in Nigeria. Atiku Abubakar was Obasanjo’s Vice President (1999-2007) who is also widely reputed to have corruptly enriched himself. Bola Ahmed Tinubu is a former Governor of Lagos (1999-2007) and a major politician and businessman in Nigeria.

and survived – because it was the media that supported us nonetheless. We observed that there are differences of opinion between the owners and the reporters. The reporters like what was happening. They agreed with it despite all the machinations. Hence there is wall of difference between media proprietors in Nigeria and the reporters

All these, in our view, indicate a high extent of watchdog journalism in highlighting issues of corruption in the press, even if most of the stories are by-product of information subsidy. That reports of corruption gets to the press with such frequency and prominence reflects watchdog function on the part of the press. However, these newspapers' reporters (at least those interviewed) appear to be keenly aware of the wider politics and power play in relation to anti-corruption, and of their place in it. Indeed, the suggestion by several of them, as noted above, that independent sources of corruption are mostly aggrieved persons who may have hidden motives is itself an indication of this awareness. Secondly, they appear equally aware of the politics of the CIAs from whom they source majority of their corruption stories. They appear mindful of the publicity needs of agencies or committees investigating cases of corruption and the possibility that some of the motives of these agencies may go beyond anti-corruption per se. INTWEE 10, who claims several years' experience of reporting an anti-corruption agency beat, says that:

Of course. Every agency or parastatal of government would want to give the impression that they are working... And these are agencies that are funded by the budget... So sometimes they would want to use the media to justify either the budgets that were allocated to them or in order for them to get more funding. That is why in most interviews, they always talk of poor funding as their major challenge... They also try to do their own public relations to launder their image where things are not going well

But INTWEE 22 says simply that “they have their own spokespersons and then for most of them it is what they want you to know. Even when they are compromised, they will not want to tell you that”. Moreover, reporters appear

to approach these agencies with suspicion, given that corruption is widespread everywhere in the country. In response to these, reporters appear to exercise *discretion* and *monitoring* in their coverage of stories from the CIAs at varying moments of the reporting process. For example, a senior investigative reporter, INTWEE 2, observes that EFCC for example, gives press releases to them about who the agency is investigating, arresting or prosecuting, but that “they don’t give you details, except when you meet some of their lawyers, some of who can give you insights sometimes”. INTWEE 23 cited earlier above suggests that he did not use the name of the bank in the headline as provided by in the EFCC release copy not only to protect the bank, but also because, some of the press releases are short on details and that:

don’t forget that some of these anti-corruption agencies are also corrupt. There is corruption even in the anti-corruption agencies. So at times when they make noise about an issue it is because they are trying to gain cheap media whatever. So at times you the media guy you have to be careful that you are not being used

The above view is supported by several respondents. But in addition to exercising journalistic discretion on what stories are covered from the CIAs or how, newspapers also tend to play a monitoring role on these agencies, on the understanding that they too, like the media and government, may not be free from corruption. For example, a senior editor, INTWEE 9, notes that “so the moment the EFCC begins investigating a person, it gets into the media and gets wide coverage. And it is the same thing with the national assembly. Even sometimes when the national assembly is trying to play funny, the glare of the media makes them act otherwise”. Four other reporters make similar observations. One of them, INTWEE 10, with experience of reporting anti-corruption agency beat earlier above, observes that reporters sometimes obtain the same petitions submitted to the agency and conduct their own independent investigations, because “sometimes their investigations die but because you are

also on the case, you now begin to hammer on the issue and it now becomes a matter in the public domain so that they are also put on their toes". This view was supported by four other respondents some of whom, like INTWEE 22, above claims that some corruption scandals in fact originate from the newspapers, which are then followed up by the anti-corruption agencies. As he claims:

But sometimes, you also find out that some issues are raised by the media and then taken up by these other agencies... For example, if there is a collapse of bridge, the media can say this bridge collapsed, we find out it was because it was a shoddy job that was done, why it was a shoddy job, how much was budgeted, the media might not be able to get that. These other government establishments would be able to get such facts. That's why it is as if the media could start some of these things and these agencies could take over, and then the media will help them to project it to the public light.

In conclusion, overall reporting of corruption to the extent our quantitative analysis reveals, together with journalistic discretion and monitoring of the agencies mandated to investigate corruption are indications of what we refer here as 'strong watchdog' journalism in coverage of corruption.

Chapter Six: Data II: Investigative Journalism in the Nigeria press

6.1 Introduction:

Research questions 2, 3 and 4 (RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4) aim to determine how Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting and to what extent they have the autonomy to do it; how much of it is reflected in investigative reporting of corruption as published in the sampled newspapers; and to what extent has the freedom of information impacted its practice in the country. In this sense, the questions assume a link between conception, practice and institutional framework of investigative reporting. Furthermore, the questions are part of the central research objective of understanding how and to what extent corruption is reported in the Nigerian press, and what specific role, if any, independent investigative journalism plays in that reportage. In this chapter, I present findings from both content analysis and ethnographic data to address these questions. Briefly, I find that in contrast to South American journalists, for example, Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting in precisely the same ways as their Anglo-American counterparts. But the operational structure and organization of investigative reporting in Nigerian newspapers is almost non-existent, or informal at best. In addition, journalists believe they have significant latitude from their editorial superiors and proprietors. However, independent journalistic investigation of corruption as expressed in published news reports is quite small, at barely 5% of overall coverage of corruption in the sampled newspapers. I discuss these findings and their implications in the next chapter.

In a survey of journalists in 33 countries, Weaver and Willnat (2012: 2) identify a typology of six role perceptions that journalists in different countries are

assumed to exhibit to varying degrees. These include 'reporting the news quickly', 'reporting objectively', 'providing analysis of events', 'watchdog role', 'providing access for the public' and 'providing entertainment' (Weaver and Willnat, 2012: 536). In other words, journalists in different countries understand themselves to be performing one or more of these roles in their everyday journalistic activities and practices, but some more than others. Hanitzsch et al (2011) find four journalistic role perceptions in 18 countries, namely 'populist disseminators', 'detached watchdogs', 'critical change agent', and 'opportunist facilitator' (see also, Hanitzsch, 2011; 2007a; 2006; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011). These models of journalism culture across the world have in turn inspired several national case studies (Hanusch, 2008; Herscovitz, 2004; (Mellado, 2012; Ireri, 2016) as well as for non-western countries (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2016) and transnational journalism (Hellmueller, 2017). Other researchers investigate connections between role conceptions and news content (Mellado et al, 2016; Lee et al, 2016; Mellado, 2015; Pihl-Thingvad, 2015; Mellado and van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc et al, 2013; Willnat et al, 2013; Strömbäck et al, 2012; van Dalen et al, 2012; Josephi, 2005; Donsbach, 2004; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). For example, Shoemaker and Reese (1996: 103) hold that the assumptions journalists have about what they do influence editorial decisions and therefore news content. Also, Mellado and van Dalen (2014: 863) observe that role conception implies a corresponding role performance or enactment, expressed in newsroom decisions or news contents, particularly in countries where, in their words, "the Western model of professional journalism" proves difficult. Van Dalen et al (2012) combine a survey of 425 journalists in 4 European countries and the U.S with a content analysis of 1,035 newspaper articles of political coverage in these countries. They find that journalistic role conceptions are reflected in the reporting styles of political news in these countries, and that

these varies more between countries than within them (ibid: 903). Mellado (2015) constructs a typology of reporting styles that fit certain role perceptions based on some indicators such as the extent of journalistic voice in the story, power relations, and appeal to audience. In this typology, investigative reporting as one of six story forms that enact the watchdog function (others are questioning, critiques, denouncing, conflict, coverage of trials and external research) (ibid: 602). Yet, not much research has been done about the role conceptions of investigative reporters as a specific group (Lanosga et al, 2017: 266), although they are known to emphasise roles like helping people, influencing politics and adversarialism towards politics and business (ibid: 283). Collectively however, these studies illustrate the significance of professional norms to understanding journalistic processes and practices, as well as how country specific social and political contexts may influence both these norms and the practices they supposedly engender.

Similar research on Nigerian journalists does not yet exist in the literature. However, in Kenya and Uganda, journalists rate ‘the watchdog role’ lower than roles as ‘disseminator’ and ‘advocate for social change’ (Ireri, 2016; Mwesige, 2004). Nevertheless, as noted in chapter one, the watchdog role is said to rank highly in the Nigerian newspaper press, although not so highly in the broadcast sector (Oso, 2013). Secondly, how journalists understand and define investigative reporting can be influenced by perception of their roles in relation to society and government (Waisbord, 2000: xvi-xvii). Against the background of this literature, I examine how the journalists and editors interviewed in this research understand and define investigative journalism and its connections to news reporting of corruption in the country.

6.2: Conception of investigative reporting in the Nigerian press:

In general, Nigerian journalists interviewed for this research understand and describe investigative reporting in terms of independent journalistic initiative, research led procedures for reporting, as well as its impact on corruption and good governance in Nigeria. Furthermore, they suggest that investigative reporting requires a 'higher' moral and ethical commitment of the reporter and distinguish it from other forms of reporting practices. For example, while speaking on the kinds of journalism he favours for his paper, a senior editor, INTWEE 9, says that he detests "press release journalism" and laments that journalists no longer care about "pounding the street investigating, establishing the facts". This tendency to contrast investigative reporting to other journalistic practices is evident in the views of four other respondents, another of whom, a business reporter (INTWEE 14), provides a detailed definition that:

First of all, it is very in-depth. Then an investigative story is never PR, you are going to see hard facts. One thing that is a major difference is the fact that investigative journalism is all about saying something that somebody doesn't want the public to know while a routine story is saying something that person is expecting you to say, that is just the difference

This description explicitly contrasts investigative reporting to public relations, by stressing that the information sought and published is one that others would like to hide, a view taken by nearly all the respondents. For example, a third reporter (INTWEE 12) expresses the same idea that: "investigation is part of journalism and they say whatever I don't want to give you; that is what you ask for". A fourth respondent, a senior editor (INTWEE 17) shares this view by observing that "you have to look for something that somebody has hidden. You are looking for something that public officers or business barons and scammers would not like you to see... It's like research, normal research". These examples

point to the independent initiative of the reporter in initiating the investigative story, a key dimension of how investigative reporting is conceived in the literature. Terms like 'research', 'digging', and 'uncovering' of information were used to describe this independent initiative of the journalist, or the reporting methods associated with investigative stories. For example, one respondent (INTVWEE 27), says that "if you are an investigative reporter, the number one thing is that, you have to have that nose for information, to see what other people may see and will gloss over it, you start reading meaning to it". Yet another, referring to government officials says that "people try to cover things up. And it is our job as investigative journalists to uncover what they try to cover up". Moreover, as the quote above shows, the respondents also understand investigative reporting in terms of the impact it is assumed to have on society, or more specifically on corruption in Nigeria. As a political reporter at one of the publications explains, "what is required is to dig in to a corruption case that can nail someone". Finally, respondents also approach investigative reporting in terms of the resources it requires. As INTVWEE 17 puts it: "you know, investigative journalism requires training. To develop the capacity to investigate stories and follow-up... So thorough investigation requires money, requires skills and requires character of the journalists". This was a view shared by several respondents who emphasise time, money, expertise and moral commitment of the reporter.

But the description and understanding of investigative reporting by Nigerian journalists above reflects definitions of it in the literature. That is, a form of reporting that is different from or superior to other kinds of journalism in terms of journalistic initiative, objective method of fact finding, a higher moral, ethical and resource commitment of the reporter or media organization, and impact on power and society (Lanosga, 2015a: 370; Starkman, 2014: 7-10; Coronel, 2010:

113; Stetka and Örnebring, 2013: 415; Feldstein, 2007: 500-501; Waisbord, 2000: xv; Blevens, 1997: 258; Aucoin, 1995b: 430). For example, Coronel (2013: 112) holds that investigative reporting is the “pinnacle” of journalism, requiring “highest order skills and noblest principles” whose function is to hold institutions of power to account for effecting desired changes in society. Ettema and Glasser (2007: 491) reason that investigative reporting is journalism’s most “politically vigorous and methodologically rigorous” form of practice. Similarly, Stetka and Örnebring (2013: 415) suggest four ‘key elements’, namely, ‘systematic, often long-term nature of investigative work’, that reporting uncovers ‘wrongdoings of some type, legal or otherwise’ made by ‘persons in positions of power’, and thus, a reporting which requires more time and resource commitment. Moreover, Blevens (1997: 257-258) contends that a combination of three criteria is the basis for distinguishing investigative reporting from other kinds of journalism. These, he claims, include independent journalistic initiative, secrecy of the information sought and impact to the public. Thus, he notes that these criteria were the basis for which U.S investigative reporters considered Watergate (*Washington Post*) as a piece of investigative reporting, but the Pentagon Papers (*New York Times*) as not, since the former involved independent discovery by journalists in a way the latter did not. More than half of the respondents in this research make a similar distinction that stories of corruption that reach the press through activities of anti-corruption agencies or parliamentary investigations cannot be considered investigative reporting⁶⁵. In this sense, Nigerian journalists’ understanding of investigative

⁶⁵ For example, a managing editor at *Daily Trust* says: “That is not investigative. The element of exclusivity has to be there. EFCC has done all its investigation and is ready to arraign somebody over certain criminal offences. It will tell several newspapers or media organization. So the story is not related to you alone and so that is not an investigative story. The story is a routine story because the investigation has already been done by the authority and not by the media. Unless if the information divulged one person alone and then it is not an investigative story but an exclusive story. An investigative story must be done by the journalist”. However, another *Daily Trust* investigative reporter and former EFCC correspondent clarifies further that: Now you as a

reporting, as described above, reflect those of their US counterparts. But Stetka and Örnebring (2013: :415) and Waisbord (2000: xix) observe that definitions of investigative reporting in the political communication literature are not universal because they have been influenced by assumptions of U.S investigative reporters. Indeed, Waisbord (2000: xv-xix) finds that Latin American journalists see ‘investigation’ in all reporting, not just that which requires specific methods or procedures. Furthermore, he suggests that the ‘independent initiative’ of the reporter will be limited in social and political systems where robust official data are lacking; as would be ‘impact’ in contexts where political apathy is entrenched precisely because news of official corruption is commonplace. Consequently, he concludes that although “the U.S model of investigative journalism is extremely influential, it is not the only possible paradigm” (ibid: xix). Waisbord is here suggesting that investigative journalism, and indeed journalism generally, can be context specific in both ideals and practice. For example, investigative reporters in the U.S are “much more likely to justify” controversial reporting practices in investigative journalism like using official or personal documents without permission, impersonation, hidden recording technology and so on (Lanosga et al, 2017: 281). But investigative reporters in Latin America and Caribbean countries overwhelmingly reject such practices (Joyce et al, 2017: 470). Moreover, Tong (2012: 14-17) has observed that unlike in Western societies where investigative journalism is rooted in liberal democratic philosophy, in China, it has been forged by the historical traditions of Confucian ideology, liberalism in late Qing dynasty and the more recent

journalist, if for instance somebody comes to submit a petition to the EFCC and they collect, that one is not investigative journalism. But if you go beyond to now get a copy of the petition and now go and do your own investigation independent of what the EFCC is doing; then you are now doing your investigation while they are doing their own. Sometimes their investigations die but because you are also on the case, you now begin to hammer on the issue and it now becomes a matter in the public domain so that they are also put on their toes. There is also the tendency for them too to be also corrupt”. These further indicate the extent of correlation between how journalists in Nigeria and definitions of it in political communication literature.

statism of Marxist-Communist era. The point then is that investigative journalism is understood from different perspectives and practiced differently across regions and countries, depending on the specificities of history, culture and social and political systems.

But it is not an entirely surprising finding that Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting in similar ways as their Anglo-American counterparts. As we noted in chapter one, liberal journalism values have been a part of the Nigerian press since its inception (Oso, 2013: 17). First, Nigeria's media, like the political system itself, is a part of the general heritage of British colonialism, in which, as Hatchen (1971: 148-149) argues, the ideals of press freedom and watchdog were carried over from the Empire to its colonies (in Shaw, 2009: 495). Furthermore, Nigeria is said to have a political and agitational press, in both tone and reportage (Olukotun, 2000: 33; Agbaje, 1993: 459). Omu (1978) notes that by the 1880s, there were already 12 newspapers in Lagos alone, some three decades before the Nigerian state itself was formed in 1914. Furthermore, Omu documents the long march to press freedom in Nigeria from this period to the 1940s by which time Nigerian newspapers had evolved into a foremost political organ for a variety of objectives, from anti-colonialism and political education to the formation of African identity. Throughout this period, newspaper owners and editors, mostly the same persons, had recursively drawn on the principles and legal statutes concerning press freedom in Britain itself to argue against colonial legal and administrative measures to curtail press freedom in the colony. Moreover, researchers have also noted that this liberal watchdog norm in Nigerian journalism is, in practice, directed at exposing corruption and promoting democracy and good governance in the country. As one observer put it, "the Nigerian press claims that it is a watchdog whose fundamental responsibilities include safeguarding public rights against governmental

encroachment as well as exposing corruption, maladministration, graft, embezzlement, and other vices endemic within the Nigerian ruling class" (Ogbondah, 1991: 110). Thus, occupational socialization, identified as a means through which journalistic role conceptions are passed on through generations of journalists within and across countries (van Dalen et al, 2012: 903), may here account for how most of the respondents in this research understand investigative reporting similarly to their Anglo-American counterparts. Secondly, education and on the job training may have also played a part. For example, research by Maikaba (2011) shows that journalism education and research in Nigeria has been influenced by U.S 'Mass Communication' and the British 'Cultural Studies' models, with emphasis on liberal watchdog theory, journalism writing skills and quantitative research techniques. At least 8 of the respondents had studied 'mass communication' at university or HND levels in Nigeria, with two proceeding to postgraduate degrees in the U.S (Wisconsin) and South Africa (Rhodes) respectively. Additionally, nearly all the respondents reported that they have undergone some training or journalism related programmes or events in the U.S, Europe or elsewhere⁶⁶. Therefore, such networking opportunities could also explain the respondents' views of investigative reporting as described above. In other words, the findings under discussion here are consistent with a history and occupational socialization in liberal values of investigative journalism in Nigerian press. But this raises the question as to what extent they practice it, and of individual and organization dynamics for its practice.

⁶⁶ For example, a senior investigative reporter at Daily Trust said he had just returned from an international conference on investigative journalism in Lillehammer, Norway. Another said he was at such a conference in Kenya earlier in the year. Similarly, a business reporter at *The Punch* said "if you are a good reporter, the company will sponsor you to at least one international conference in a year".

6.3 Operational framework for investigative reporting in the Nigerian press:

News organizations require committing substantial resources, in manpower, money and time for investigative reporting (Tong and Sparks, 2009: 340). Also, investigative stories do not easily fit into the bureaucratic organization of everyday news work. For example, Hansen (1991: 474) finds that only about four in ten of Pulitzer winning investigative stories rely on official sources, as compared to eight in ten for regular news stories. This implies the 'research' or 'digging' element of investigative stories, which in turn make such stories more expensive in time and money. Similarly, the system of evaluation in which journalistic performance is measured by the number of stories published per week is not suitable for investigative reporting, since it is based on quantity, rather than 'quality' (Mellado; 2015: 598; Tong and Sparks, 2009: 340). Lanosga and Houston (2016: 11) find that nearly half of 861 investigative reporters they surveyed reported having a dedicated investigative unit at their organizations, even if some investigative reporters are not necessarily assigned to it. Thus, these researchers suggest that the operational organization of investigative reporting tends to be specific in media organizations in terms of staffing, budgeting, remuneration, reporting tasks, performance evaluation and so on.

Only one of the four publications in this study (*Daily Trust*) appears to have a dedicated investigative unit in their newsroom. Two respondents, one each at *The Punch* and *Thisday* are unequivocal that they do not have such a unit in their newsrooms. Two respondents at *The Guardian* claim they do have a "new" investigative desk. My own observation does not bear this out however. But a third reporter in the same paper explains:

The Guardian does not have a specific investigating desk. What we have is a special reporting desk. And because of that, some of us have actually approached the editor that let's have an investigative desk, so that anybody who is coming there has an understanding of what

they are going to do: investigation. And for me, that is the kind of desk that will actually drive a newspaper in our kind of society, where people are not transparent

In the three publications however, some respondents suggest that the lack of a permanent desk, specific to investigative reporting does not preclude practice. In their view, variously, any reporter can engage in investigative reporting, regardless of their beat. For example, INTWEE 23 at *The Punch* observes that:

No. We don't have an investigative desk yet. But what we do is that we have a module in-house that requires that every desk does good investigative reports, and there are people in the newsroom that have been identified as being good at doing investigative reports. They have distinguished themselves in that area, but we don't have an investigative desk and I am not sure we'll have it in the nearest future.

Similarly, responding to this question, INTWEE 27 at *Thisday* noted that:

Well, no. *Thisday* divides places into beats and you are supposed to be on top of your beat. So, if there are things to investigate in your beat, you can. But it doesn't stop another person who has sources or wherewithal to get in and do investigation from doing that. But I don't think we have an investigative desk specifically.

These respondents are suggesting that while Nigerian newspapers generally do not have a specific unit for investigative reporting, they do not think that this by itself is a hindrance for doing investigative stories, a claim suggested by several others. The investigative unit at *Daily Trust* comprises four reporters, one of them designated as 'head of investigations'. These reporters do mainly investigative stories and are not attached to any other beats or pages in the newspaper, but their stories are given prominence on the front pages. While speaking about this desk and the investigative stories they do, a senior editor at the paper noted that "sometimes depending on the strength of the story, what we do is we either lead or make it second just to give it more prominence or more air to breath". However, reporters in other beats within the same paper also claim to be doing investigative stories. Indeed, one business reporter claims

that he was employed as an ‘investigative reporter’ from day-one, a claim confirmed by several others. For example, a respondent at the paper clarified that, “we have a desk that we call the investigative desk and we have four staff who do it... When you talk about investigative story, it is not limited to these four members”. Thus, although *Daily Trust* differs in having a specific investigative desk, it is yet like the other publications in the general operation of investigative reporting. Reporters are required to combine investigative reporting with other reporting tasks they have, regardless of the dedicated staff. Even then, the investigative desk at *Daily Trust* itself may not be functional. I observed that there does not seem to be any significant coordination or collaboration between the four investigative reporters. I did not witness any meetings specifically by the unit. All answer directly to the news editor, editor-in-chief or his deputy rather than to the designated head of the desk. Indeed, one interviewee at the paper remarks that:

I know for example, here in *Daily Trust* we set up what we call an investigative journalism desk. Just for that. But even that arrangement has its weaknesses. One of the weaknesses is that we assume that people on the investigation desk can go wherever we get a sniff of scandal and investigate that. In practice things don’t work like that. If as a reporter you are not accredited to a particular institution you may not be able to have much access to it. For example, if I sent you to Ministry of Defense, you may not be able to enter, or to Army Headquarters, or to police

This indicates some difficulties inherent in such arrangements. In sum, the foregoing suggests a ‘roving’ mode of operation: an investigative reporter who may or may not be assigned to a specific investigative desk, and who sometimes combines investigative reporting with regular news reporting.

In addition, I find that in general newsroom support for investigative reporting is ambiguous. First, the newspapers do not appear to invest much resources, particularly in manpower and money, at least, not specifically to investigative

reporting. INTVWEE 18 at *The Guardian* presents a general outlook of the media system on this, that: “the issue of resource allocation is a very key area. It’s not always there. And that is why our journalism practice is the way it is. The main media in Nigeria, they make money. But the amount they invest in stories, in content generation, is another issue. They don’t invest in it so much”. This general position may not fully reflect the specific circumstances of individual newspapers, given the political economic conditions of the country. However, it is supported by the observation that none of the four publications studied maintains a specific budget for investigative reporting other than the general budget for editorial activities. Furthermore, investigative reporters earn just the same salaries as other reporters, although they (and other journalists too) can benefit from other kinds of incentives that exist in the newspapers such as weekly or monthly awards for stories published. The same applies for medical or other insurance cover. Another reporter at the same paper says that “resources needed to do a job at a particular time will be made available. It is not as if we earmark specific amounts to the desk for investigations. But within the budget for operations in the year, the editor can use to send for special investigations that we know can be of value to the newspaper”. This view is corroborated by yet another reporter at *Daily Trust* who says that “Yes. We have a budget, not specifically for investigative reporting, but for editorial expenses. There is a budget for editorial expenses. So, if I’m doing an investigative story or if I’m doing a feature story and I need to send people out, the money will be taken from that budget”. The foregoing suggests further that investigative reporting in these newspapers is operationally part of general news reporting, rather than as a distinct activity within the newspapers’ overall editorial operations. It is not allocated separate resources nor fully coordinated under a specific unit. Most investigative reporters combine regular news reporting along

with doing investigative stories. Consequently, they are not treated differently in terms of pay or assessed by different indicators of performance. One implication of this is that investigative reporters tend to lack sufficient time to conduct investigative stories, particularly because their performance is not evaluated separately as two investigative reporters at two of the publications lamented. Yet, as we shall see shortly, time and different standards of performance evaluation are a crucial element of investigative reporting practice and a significant aspect of its institutionalization in media organizations.

The point to note here is that if the principles of watchdog journalism have long been entrenched in Nigerian political journalism, they have not been fully structured into the operational organization of newspapers in the country. In short, investigative journalism is not operationally separated from other newsroom activities, even for the fourth publication which does have an investigative desk. According to Tong and Sparks (2009: 340-342), when investigative reporting first emerged in China in the early 1990s, following liberalization of the media market, it was predominantly an individualized practice. Individual journalists took the initiative and bore the costs and the risks by themselves, without much input from their media organizations. As the practice became popular with audiences however, newsrooms took over these responsibilities and risks: dedicated desks and special budgets for investigative reporting, higher pay and legal cover for investigative reporters, and different standards for performance evaluation. Such newsroom support for investigative reporting, they argue, led to its 'institutionalization' and 'professionalization'. Consequently, investigative reporting became the darling of Chinese journalism, and investigative reporters gained a higher status and prestige among their peers on other beats. Similarly, Doig (1992: 46) notes that at its peak in the 1970s, *Sunday Times* investigative unit, *Insight* enjoyed "plenty of time, large

budgets and a strongly supportive editorial approach". All these suggest that certain structural and operational changes are required within newsrooms to institutionalize investigative reporting everywhere. But as the data above shows, such structural changes have yet to take hold in Nigerian journalism, despite claims of a liberal watchdog. In sum, then, one way to conceptualize investigative reporting in Nigerian newspapers is to say that the practice is not yet institutionalized or professionalized, despite the underlying values of watchdog against corruption or adversarial relations to the state. This then leads us to a consideration of other aspects of the operational mechanism for investigative reporting, namely, journalistic autonomy.

6.4 Journalism autonomy and investigative reporting in the Nigerian press:

Weaver et al (2007: 70) understand professional autonomy as the "latitude that a practitioner has in carrying out his or her occupational duties" (cited in Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013: 135). Drawing from this, McDevitt (2003: 156) defines journalistic autonomy as the principle that ensures the press and journalists fulfill their "duty of informing the citizenry, free from partisan bias and other corrupting influences". Moreover, McDevitt's 'corrupting influences' imply a wide range of factors and forces which can affect the editorial decisions of individual journalists, editors and media organizations, and consequently their practices as expressed in news content. Thus, Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) and Reich and Hanitzsch (2013) comb the vast literature on journalistic autonomy and identify six possible influences on journalistic autonomy: political, economic, organizational, procedural, professional and reference group influences. Political influences emphasize autonomy from politics and the state and thus deal with questions of press freedom and censorship, legal environment, as well as the relationships between journalists and various individual or institutional political actors in the production of news. Economic

influences emphasize the profit-making concerns of advertisers and media owners. Organizational influences issue from the hierarchical organization of the media comprising management and editorial decisions that can yet influence what journalists do or don't do. Procedural influences refer to operational constraints arising from organizational routines, such as time and space, rather than straightforward decisions of senior editors and managers. Professional influences could come from the policies and rules of the profession itself, for example, journalistic codes of conduct by national unions of journalists everywhere. In addition, reference groups such as peers, colleagues, friends and family could also influence news reporting and by implication news content (*ibid*). For Sjøvaag (2013: 160) however, journalistic autonomy is an inherent aspect of the normative model of journalism that can be manifested at every level of journalistic practice, from institutional dynamics to individual decisions. For investigative reporting, autonomy implies first the independent initiative to investigate or pursue a story, and then decisions investigative reporters must make in dealing with sources. Story initiative is significant because as Kathleen Hansen (1991: 474) notes, investigative stories frequently involve independent sources rather than official ones. Thus, the very fact of seeking out non-official sources is itself a demonstration of autonomy. Yet, such sources sometimes may have their own motives for giving tip-offs or helping initiate investigations, and thus, journalists also require dealing independently with sources too. Also, reporters need to demonstrate independence from the public officials and institutions being investigated, many of whom would have more than one reason to kill the story if they could. Moreover, autonomy, or lack of it, can be manifested in the relationship between reporters and their senior editors or proprietors, since media are themselves bureaucratically organized, and as Lanosga and Houston (2016: 9) find, most investigative reporters are paid

employees. The foregoing therefore provides a general context for examining how the reporters in this research view their autonomy for investigative reporting in four key dimensions: individual journalist, proprietor influence, advertiser influence and public officials. The first two of these are examined here, while the others form part of the discussions about press freedom and political economy of the press in the next chapter.

(a) Individual Journalistic Initiative:

Findings here show that investigative stories are initiated by editors, tip-offs from whistle blowers as well as through personal observations or through sources cultivated over the years⁶⁷. For example, INTVWEE 22 observed that:

Sometimes it starts from complaints, either individual complaints or public complaints. Sometimes, somebody might walk in, somebody who is hurt, somebody who is aggrieved will explain to you this is what happened, for example, I can't get justice, knowing fully well that if you come in, you could make a change. You could start from there. And then, some other times, you could be passing by, you get to know about something happening, directly or indirectly through somebody or through reports and you follow up and you get to find out that it is much deeper than on the surface. And then you dig deeper. And you find out a lot of things. Especially for public goods

The editor's comment here indicates the range of possibilities from which an investigative report might be initiated, from citizens' tip-offs⁶⁸ to personal observations. It also indicates the various stages and processes by which some form of professional autonomy of the journalist or editor might be exercised.

⁶⁷ For example, *The Guardian* investigative reporter who investigated the conditions of internally displaced persons arising from the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East said that "it was the editor's idea. The editor called me up and said he wanted me to go to the north east to go and check what is actually happening there. It was an open offer, waiting for me to take it up. So I agreed to go".

⁶⁸ A *Daily Trust* investigative reporter who was investigating a case of corruption at the Abuja Geographical Information Systems told me the story started through tip-off he got from a staff at the agency who supplied him with documents of contracts, and of the companies, that were awarded to circumvent due process. He claimed to have investigated the tip off by among other things verifying from the Cooperative Affairs Commission that the some of the companies were fake or not duly registered. The story was subsequently published on 8 October 2015 while I was still there doing my newsroom observations.

Furthermore, the comment also distinguishes sources of investigative reporting from those of beat reporting, by not including official channels such as public releases or press conferences. This is a significant demonstration of autonomy and initiative since news from official or formal sources such as government offices generally tend to be promotional, even where the material is in the public interest. Third, it indicates the research element of 'dig deeper' that transforms story initiatives into investigations and subsequently published news stories. But this process itself requires exerting journalistic autonomy by not taking tip-off at its face-value, and thus demonstrating the journalist's independence even from her own sources. The comment above is suggestive of the views of several other respondents on how they initiate investigative stories. For example, INTVWEE 2 claims that he gets his story ideas by following news in other media or by observing events in the streets, from which he then investigates further. This reporter then recounted two examples of previous investigative reports he did both of which sprang from personal observations or following other media. In one example, the reporter investigated claims by the federal government that it was using debt relief monies to build primary healthcare centers in many states across the country to meet the Millennium Development Goals targets. But according to the reporter, his investigations gainsay the claims: the primary healthcare centers did not exist. This again demonstrates that journalists use their own initiative in generating stories and are free to do so, a crucial aspect of any notion of journalistic autonomy.

(b) Organizational and Proprietor Influence:

Beyond autonomy in initiating stories and in dealing with sources however, majority of the respondents claim that they do not face any interference from their editors or publishers from investigating any case of possible or actual corruption. INTVWEE 23 says that his Managing Director does not interfere with

reporters' investigations, even if officials or companies being investigated had got in touch with him. As he put it:

I will give you an example. There was a time a telecoms company was fined by the NCC. The spokesperson of the company called and said please, don't use this story. I told him I don't have the power to kill a story in *The Punch*. He called my editor, but she too doesn't have the power... And they made the mistake of reaching out to the MD of the company. And the MD didn't say anything until the following morning the story came out. We used the story. If we had not done so, the MD would have said so that is how we have been killing stories. And the company is one our biggest advertisers. But we still run the story.

First, the statements by these two respondents provide a general illustration of the relationships between investigative reporters and politicians or advertisers which we discuss shortly. Secondly, the statements are indicative of what Sjøvaag (2013) denotes as the *negative* aspect of journalism autonomy. That is, in this case, the idea that investigative reporters should be free from interference from senior editors, owners of their media, or other powerful individuals or institutions. Virtually all the reporters interviewed cited instances in which their proprietors or editors stood by them to get a story in the press. But there is also a positive aspect of journalistic autonomy in which respondents claim that proprietors encourage, even actively promote investigative reporting in the newsroom. For investigative reporting, this positive aspect of autonomy, I suggest, can be demonstrated in several ways, for example, by way of resource allocation and other incentives to investigative reporters, and, as Tong (2012) claims of investigative journalism in China, by protecting individual journalists from any direct political fallout of their investigative reports. Three senior editors from two of the publications under study report that they positively encourage their reporters to do investigative reporting, to "pound the streets investigating", in the words of one of them. According to him,

We have incentive for the journalists every week. Even today by 4 O'clock we have a meeting where we review all the papers for the last one week. We give story of the week. A lot of the time you will be pleased to note that it is investigative stories that win the prize for story of the week. And then we have reporter of the month, feature of the month, business story of the month, picture, cartoon, all the different aspects of the paper, they get rewarded. They get monetary reward, you get a letter also, and at a point you even get a book related to whatever you are covering whether investigative or whatever.

This senior editor is alluding to the incentives his paper supposedly gives to investigative reporting, but it also shows that the incentive structure for investigative reporting, too, is subsumed as part of the general newsroom organization, not separately as would be expected in a more standardized context for the practice of investigative reporting. For example, in their survey of 861 US self-declared investigative reporters, Lanosga and Houston (2016: 7) observed that investigative reporters have an income higher than the average non-investigative reporter, indicating a higher incentive for investigative reporting particularly. Similarly, INTVWEE 18 noted, at the time of our interview, that he had only recently been promoted to Features Editor, as reward for his investigative enterprise,⁶⁹ which, he claims, was meant to encourage others. Also, INTVWEE 2 noted that the weekend edition of the paper he edits depends on investigative reports. As he explains:

For the Sunday newspaper, we are very unfortunate in the sense that newsmakers go to bed, they go to marriages and birthday parties etc. So on Saturdays you hardly find news breaking. So the only way we can survive is by doing investigative stories. When I say regularly, I

⁶⁹ This was confirmed by the investigative reporter in question; the same reporter who had done reports on the conditions of internally displaced persons in the north east and who said that media owners do not invest much in "content generation", as he put it.

always ensure that we do a story that is investigative at least once in a week

Thus, these statements indicate that editors and senior managers tend to encourage investigative reporting in the newspapers under study, even if, as we observed above, the practice itself is not sufficiently institutionalized or professionalized within the organizations. Indeed, while some respondents were quick to point out that investigative journalism requires enormous resources, they were also quick to say that their organizations generally support and reward such reporting activities through prizes, conferences or promotions, etc. However, INTVWEE 27 believes that funding used to be available but is now 'tight'. He observes that:

Most times, it has do with your relationship with your editor. Some editors will just say okay go ahead and they will assist you. Sometimes, you can apply for trips and build in one or two things and in that trip, it is for you to investigate. That was then but now it is very very rare to get such funding, probably because management has a lot of things in its hands, or probably they feel you should be able to use your own resources, or your contacts to get whatever you need. But I am sure, if you want to investigate something that is very big, maybe they will give you some support.

This suggests further that funding investigative reporting may be an informal process, rather than institutionalized as part of the budgeting for editorial operations. Indeed, this 'sporadic' allocation of resources for investigative reporting itself indicates that it is not much of a full-time practice by journalists within the organizations, otherwise funding would rather be on a more permanent basis, much like salaries for example. So far, we find that Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting as a research-led initiative of the reporter, the purpose of which is to check corruption and hold power accountable. Furthermore, although it is not sufficiently institutionalized within

media organizations, journalists have considerable individual and organizational latitude to practice it. These provide a background for examining how much investigative reporting newspapers do as expressed in investigative reports of corruption coded in the newspapers under study.

6.5 Performance of investigative reporting in the Nigerian press: IMI data

Table 6.1 below shows both the absolute and relative frequencies of corruption stories coded in each category according to attribution of sources and types of stories as previously explained. As the table shows, just 4.76% of corruption news coded in the sampled newspapers were independently reported by the four publications combined the research period. That is, while overall frontpage coverage of corruption is extensive in the newspapers, as we saw in chapter four, only a very small fraction (4.76%) of that reportage is product of investigative journalism by the newspapers, as shown below. In terms of positioning, 39.06% were reported as lead stories, while the remaining 60.94% were not. Thus, the amount of lead stories in the IMI category is reasonably higher than the 30.08% for all corruption stories in the sample coded. Therefore, although these newspapers are less likely to report corruption independently, they are yet more likely to lead the news with their own investigative stories.

Table 6.1 Distribution of corruption stories by categories

Categories (sources of corruption stories)	Frequency of corruption stories	% of corruption stories
Independent Media Investigations (IMI)	64	4.76%
Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACA)	183	13.61%
National (and State) Assemblies (NA)	134	9.96%
Commissions Of Inquiry (COI)	99	7.36%
Foreign Media (FM)	15	1.12%
Diaspora/Online Media (DOM)	5	0.37%
OTHER	115	8.55%
Follow up Corruption Stories (FS)	383	28.48%
Narrative of Corruption Stories (NC)	347	25.80%
Total Corruption Stories (TCS)	1345	100.00%

The finding above is supported by several journalists and editors interviewed in this research. For example, INTWEE 27 observes that “investigative journalism in Nigeria has almost died”. Another reporter corroborated this, saying that “to be honest with you, I must say that we are still trying to scratch the surface of investigative journalism, not just in business but across all other sectors”. Indeed, for INTWEE 17, investigative journalism in Nigeria is simply “a joke”. But another senior editor interviewed reflects that “However I am not making excuses. I know that we can do better than we are doing now because somethings can be done with patience and persistence... But really the Nigerian media now does little investigation and even less follow up”. This represents the general view of the respondents in relation to the amount of independent investigative reporting in the press, although INTWEE 22 observed that sometimes newspapers’ investigations are often taken up by the state level authorities investigating corruption in the country. In other words, the amount of investigative reporting of corruption as observed in news content is consistent with the general view of the practitioners themselves. This reflects what, Hasty (2005b: 340) says of press and politics in Ghana, that journalists rhetorically trumpet their role as agents of ‘good governance’ through “exposure and critique of corruption”, within western models of liberal democracy, but their everyday practices can be very different in both intent and news content. For the Nigerian press, the implication here is clear: without corruption investigating agencies, there will be very little disclosure of corruption in the press. Conversely, the implication could be the other way around: there is little independent exposure of corruption by newspapers precisely *because* these agencies exist to do the job. In other words, the political culture of anti-corruption in the country, is the key element that accounts for exposure of corruption in the country, rather than investigative reporting.

(a) Annual trend of investigating reporting:

Furthermore, coverage varies across the years. Figure 6.1 below shows a graphic representation of the amount and annual trends of independent coverage of corruption over the research period. First, unlike for overall coverage of corruption, there is no steady increase in investigative reports of corruption over the years. Instead, investigative reports of corruption stay much the same annually with only marginal increases or decreases from one year to the next, except between 2007 and 2008 which recorded 0% and 18.75% (the highest), respectively. Moreover, unlike in the overall distribution of corruption news which tends to be concentrated in a handful of 'golden' years of coverage, investigative stories of corruption are almost evenly distributed over the period. One implication of this is that for investigative stories, journalists depend on their own initiative and resources for news of corruption, rather than the supply of news from corruption investigating authorities. In this sense, both annual variation, and as we shall see, differences in coverage between the publications is to be expected. Indeed, this variation is itself a key indicator of investigative reporting: an independent report of corruption by a newspaper is unlikely to appear in other media.

Figure 6.1 Investigative stories of corruption in the sampled newspapers



(b) Freedom of Information and investigative reporting:

Also, Freedom of Information Law appears to have little impact on investigative reporting of corruption, if any. The law was passed in May 2011⁷⁰ by then President Goodluck Jonathan, after twelve years of bickering between the federal legislature and the presidency on the one hand, and the media and civil society on the other (Ojebode, 2011: 268). Moreover, the law was specifically designed to further the fight against corruption with provisions that compel public officials to disclose information, while providing protections for whistleblowers “who can be allies for investigative journalists” (Ojebode, 2011: 278). Thus, I check the extent to which the new law may have had any impacts on investigative reporting of corruption by comparing annual trends of investigative stories before and after the law was passed. If the law impacted positively on journalists’ autonomy to seek and disclose information about corruption, we would expect a significant increase in the frequency of investigative reports in the months following the enactment of the law. But as the data here shows, in 2011, the very year the law came into force, investigative

⁷⁰ This leaves only 18 months from when the FOI bill was passed into law to the end of the period covered by this research (June 2011-December 2012).

coverage dropped to 3.13% from 7.81% in the previous year. It rises to 12.50% in the following year, 2012 (see Figure 6.1 above). This would at first indicate that the law had a positive impact during its first year. However, when considered in absolute, rather than relative terms (see Table 6.2 above), there are only 3 additional investigative stories from 2010 (the year before law) and 2012 (the year after the law). This marginal increase is not different from other increases between any three years throughout the period, for example, between 2001 and 2003. Indeed, the change from 2001 to 2003 is greater than from 2010 to 2012. Thus, the rise in investigative reports in the year following passage of the law is unlikely to have been caused by the law itself. Moreover, as we shall see in the next chapter, several respondents corroborated that the freedom of information law has not had much impact on investigative reporting in the country. Indeed, the impression is that legal constraints on the press are not the problem.

(c) Targets of investigative reporting:

In addition, 59.38% of the investigative stories involved persons or institutions in the federal government, while 23.44% of the stories involved officials in the states (see Table 6.3 below). This shows that much like in the overall coverage of corruption, there is more news of corruption in the federal government than in the states or that the newspapers are more inclined to investigating corruption in the federal government than in the states or the private sectors. Also, while there are 36 states in the country, only four featured in the investigative stories: Lagos, Kano, Enugu, and Oyo states. This suggests either there is no corruption in 32 states or newspapers are investigating it independently, and thus further revealing the extent of independent reporting in coverage of corruption in the press. Similarly, just 9.38% of investigative stories involved wrongdoing by persons in the private sector, represented under

column PS (Private Sector) in Table 6.3. The remainder represents investigative reports involving a combination of officials in the federal and state governments or the private sector.

Table 6.2 Investigative stories of corruption by actors involved

Actors	Investigative stories	% of investigative stories
Federal Government	38	59.38%
State Government	15	23.44%
Private Sector	6	9.38%
Combination	5	7.81%
Total	64	100.00%

These findings are consistent with some previous research and could be further explained by the structural pattern of Nigeria's media and political systems. For example, Ekstrom et al (2006) study seven forms of what they call "scrutiny journalism" in the Swedish local press and politics, including "digging or revealing journalism", that is, investigative reporting, "quality tests", "closer observations of service" areas and so on. They analyse 1500 articles in the local press over three interval years between 1961 and 2001, they find "no digging articles at all in 1961, only two in 1981 and very little change up to 2001". Also, Dincer and Johnston (2016: 135) observe that as a national newspaper, coverage of corruption in the *New York Times* primarily concerns the national government and thus may exclude corruption stories at the local levels of U.S political organization. But Dincer and Johnston argue further that local newspapers too may not be suitable for analysis of press coverage of corruption since they could be owned or controlled commercially by the same persons or groups involved in the corruption cases being investigated or because they generally face more economic constraints and 'topic fatigue' (ibid). Indeed, in his survey of reporters in U.S local dailies, Berkowitz (2007: 557) finds that "reporters at small U.S dailies are less likely to undertake investigative projects", both because of their

newsroom pressures and the external economic factors, although investigative reporting remains a strong ideal among them. In effect, then, investigative reporting may be less at lower levels of political and media organization, as recorded here in the case of Nigeria. But for Nigeria, this is worsened by the near absence of local newspapers, or where they exist, they tend to be owned and controlled by local governments particularly at the state level. Thus, the prospect of their autonomy to investigate and report corruption at that level is low, if any at all. In Nigeria, reporters in state owned media are by definition, civil servants under the pay of the state or local government at that level (Ciboh, 2007). Equally significant, the ‘national’ newspapers tend to have little organizational and staffing reach beyond major centres like Abuja, Lagos and a few other cities which further hampers the possibility of investigative reporting of corruption at the state and local government levels. Finally, in general, investigative reporting tends to focus more on the politicians and the political system than the business elites or the economic system (Carson, 2014; Starkman, 2014). For example, Carson (2014) finds only 45 investigative stories, in his analysis of 21,000 news pages in five Australian ‘quality press’ over 1971 to 2011. Of the 45 investigative stories, Carson adds, only 3 were “corporate investigations”. Thus, he concludes that investigative reporting is an exceptional form of reporting in the Australian media, and corporate investigations rarer still (*ibid*: 734). Thus, that less than 10% of investigative stories of corruption involve the private sector may reflect this general trend. But more significantly, since the Nigerian press is overwhelmingly political in interest, tone and reportage (Olukotun, 2000), it is possible that newspapers’ conception of investigative reporting focus more on the government and politics than the private sector.

The figures and analyses above represent coverage of corruption in the four publications combined. Investigative reporting of corruption varies significantly

across individual publications however. For example, 48.44% of the total investigative stories of corruption were coded from one publication alone, that is, *Daily Trust*. This could be explained by the fact that it is this newspaper that has an investigative desk with four dedicated investigative reporters, in addition to several others on others beats who contribute investigative reports. Indeed, one senior editor there was quick to point out that because they have an investigative unit staffed with experienced investigative reporters, “we have been doing quite a number of investigative reports”. In addition, three of the permanent investigative reporters at the paper told me about the investigations they were doing at the time⁷¹. One of them said he was investigating the state of breast cancer treatment in Nigerian hospitals. Another was investigating corruption at the Abuja Geographic Information Systems which was published before I left, as previously mentioned. On the other hand, I did not observe similar activities at *The Guardian* during two weeks of fieldwork there, although one of their reporters had just returned from investigating the conditions of internally displaced persons in the areas affected by insurgency⁷². In other words, these further explain why nearly half of corruption stories investigated by the newspapers were coded from *Daily Trust* alone.

(d) Variation of Investigative reporting by publication:

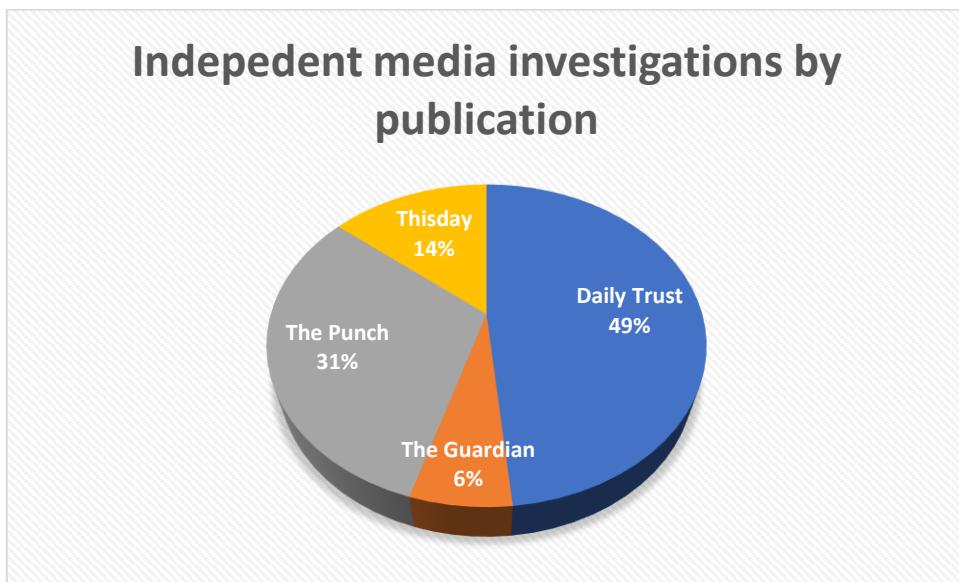
As can be seen from Figure 6.2 below, 31.25% of the investigative stories were reported in *The Punch*, while *Thisday* and *The Guardian* make up the rest at 14.06% and 6.25% respectively. Thus, the range of 42.19% from highest (*Daily*

⁷¹ During 6 weeks of newsroom observation at the paper, I had various conversations with the four permanent investigative reporters on the desk, as well as several others, besides formal interviews, about which investigations they were doing at the time and how they were doing it. Based on my initial research design, I had aimed to participate fully in this process, however, it turned out that would be of limited value since most of the investigative process happened outside of the newsroom. Indeed, this was one reason why the newsroom observation proved of limited value in the research.

⁷² The reporter showed me some of the stories published from this investigation, including those he had posted on social media.

Trust) to lowest (*The Guardian*) of investigative output on corruption between the publications over the period is significantly large. This is itself an indication of independent initiative and exclusivity associated with investigative reporting. Also, the percentage of investigative reports as lead stories range from 44.44% in *Thisday* to 40.00% in *The Punch*, meaning that three of the publications are most likely to present their investigative reporting of corruption a lead stories. However, *The Guardian*'s had 0% lead stories, indicating that it is considerably less likely to engage in investigative reporting of corruption than the other publications *and* also less likely lead the news with an investigative story.

Figure 6.2 Investigative reporting of corruption by publication (n=64)



Chapter Seven: Discussion II: Hard and soft investigative reporting in Nigeria?

7.1 Introduction:

In the preceding chapter, we find that journalists in Nigeria understand investigative reporting in ways that reflect scholarly definitions of it, but that operational structures for its practice are rudimentary at best. Furthermore, we find that journalists enjoy, and often demonstrate, considerable individual and organizational autonomy. Still, investigative reports of corruption are barely 5% of overall coverage, even though they tend to have the most prominence as lead stories and most concern corruption in the federal government. Additionally, we find no marked increase in investigative stories of corruption after the freedom of information law came to force. Finally, we find that 80% of the investigative stories were reported by two of the four publications studied. Three questions emerge from these findings. What does barely 5% of investigative reports mean for press performance in the context of democratization? Second, what factors explain or account for investigative output in the press as observed above? What do the findings of this research say about the model, if any, of investigative reporting in Nigeria overall? The questions for the basis for discussion in this chapter.

7.2: Investigative journalism in Nigeria in perspective:

Investigative reporting supposedly emphasises journalistic activism and adversarialism in which reporters uncover cases of abuse, fraud or neglect by the powerful on behalf of the not so powerful. In short, it is about investigating the operation of democracy to help actualise its normative claims (Hamilton, 2016: 8; Olsen, 2008: 247; Aucoin, 1995: 430; Malarek, 1998:45, in Lockyer, 2006: 767). Informed commentary and surveys of investigative journalists consistently report that they are a special breed motivated by a sense of justice,

independence, truth and courage who place great emphasis on adversarial relations to politics and business, in reforming society, and in fighting corruption and injustice through their investigative reports (Lanosga et al, 2017: 283-284; Abdenour and Riffe; 2016: 233-235; Starkman, 2014: 10; Davies, 2009: 2-3; Aucoin, 2007: 562; Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 269). Yet, investigative reporting is more “praised” or “discussed” than it is practiced (Feldstein, 2017: E7; Hamilton, 2016: 14). Furthermore, if investigative reporting is less practiced than it is praised, there is also a sense that it is less studied than other forms of political communication, even though it is repeatedly regarded as the “pinnacle” of journalism (Coronel, 2013: 112) or the most “politically vigorous” form of journalism practice (Ettema and Glasser, 2007: 491). Indeed, content analyses of investigative reporting in the literature do not compare quantitatively with, say, analyses of elections or campaign news. Still, much work has been done on the subject, even if it tends to be national case studies, as Esser and Hartung (2004: 1042) observed. So far however, research findings point to a limited or declining amount of investigative reporting across several media systems, regardless of status of democracy (Usher, 2017; Li and Sparks, 2016; Carson, 2014; Fink and Schudson, 2014; Lanosga, 2014; Stetka and Örnebring, 2013; Houston, 2010; Walton, 2010; Cordell, 2009; Marchetti, 2009; Stock, 2009; Merljak and Kovacic, 2007; Ekstrom et al, 2006; Hasty, 2005a; 2005b; Chalaby, 2004; Waisbord, 2002, etc). In general, these studies find that investigative reports are rare to find in media content, at least in comparison to other forms of political news. For example, Nord (2007) contends that while Swedish reporters identify strongly with investigative journalism, it is yet a norm without “noticeable” practice because his content analysis of 1100 news stories finds only 9% of the stories that fit his definition of investigative reporting. Lanosga (2014: 497) observed that investigative reporting typically represents between

10% and 20% of overall Pulitzer-winning entries for most years from 1917 to 1960. Fink and Schudson (2014) analysed 1,891 front page stories in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in five selected years between 1955 and 2003. They find 0% investigative reports in both 1955 and 1967, 1% in 1979 and 2003 and 3% in 1991 (ibid: 13). Similar analysis of 21,100 news stories in five Australian broadsheets by Carson (2014: 734) finds only 45 investigative stories, of which only 3 are about corporate investigations. Belt and Just (2008: 198-200) did a similar analyses of 33,911 stories from a sample of 154 U.S local TV stations and find that only 6% of the stories “demonstrate hallmark of effort such as investigations and interviews with newspapers”. Rosenstiel et al (2007) analyse similar data but compare investigative reports to political and non-political news coverage. They find that investigative stories independently initiated by local stations account for 0.62% of all political stories and 1.14% of non-political news. Moreover, Starkman (2014; 2009) finds very little investigative reports in a sample taken from 9 ‘influential’ business newspapers that includes *Financial Times*, *Forbes* and *Bloomberg News* during the critical years leading to the 2007 global financial crisis. Just et al (2002: 102) find in a survey of 103 U.S local television stations that although 75% of stations claim to do investigative reporting, only 2% of the news they produce is investigative reporting. Investigative reporting, then, does not feature regularly in news, even in the developed democracies, despite stronger or more open institutional mechanisms. By implication therefore, in a developing democracy such as Nigeria where political protections and organizational motivation for the press are weaker, the amount of investigative reporting of corruption recorded above is more significant than 5% otherwise suggests.

There are at least three reasons for the last point above. First, investigative reporting as used in this research is limited to independent media investigations

of financial corruption only. That is, independent press reports of explicit or possible financial misconduct or wrongdoing by public officials or others in position of power in both public and private sectors in the country. But this does not necessarily exhaust investigative reporting in terms of independent journalistic initiative, digging or research-led procedures of reporting, secrecy of information sought and revealed or impact of the story on society. Neither does financial corruption exhaust the range of activities nor abuses of power frequently understood as “corruption”. For example, election rigging and ballot stuffing. Furthermore, Nigeria’s democratic context where adherence to the rule of law, or to norms of political association or party politics and other political processes such as elections, are exceptions rather than the rule (Joseph, 2008; Omotola, 2009a). For example, in his review of second wave of democratization in Africa, Diamond (2008: 144-145) contends that the “deadening hand of personal rule” continues to dominate across the region, such that much of politics comes down to a conflict between the rule of law and the rule of the big man. Thus, press investigations about regulatory breaches or campaign manoeuvres or institutional dysfunction generally, or of malfeasances like sex for grades or examination malpractices, could well legitimately be considered investigative reporting and might well have impact on the political and social system, even where ‘corruption’ is not involved. Much the same applies to what Fink and Schudson (2014: 11) call “social empathy” stories which generally ask, in their words, “what does it feel like to be this person?”. Therefore, these stories describe a person or group who might be victims of social and political action or policies, but who are not typically generally covered in news. One example of such stories was about the ‘plight’ of children orphaned by various communal clashes and political violence that have plagued

democratization in Nigeria since 1999⁷³. As we shall see in the final section of this chapter such stories were also observed in the newspapers sampled, even they were not coded because they fall outside of our unit of analysis⁷⁴.

Secondly, the finding of 4.76% of investigative stories of corruption appears quite small, and indeed it is, given Nigeria's reputation for corruption and the relative press freedom. However, this is measured against overall coverage of corruption in the sampled newspapers, comprising three types of corruption stories: corruption scandals, follow-up stories and narratives of corruption or corruption talk, which were stories about corruption but without any specific acts of corruption or wrongdoing mentioned. Indeed, we noted that corruption scandals, or stories of actual or alleged acts of corruption accounted for 45.72% of total although coded into seven categories according to source attribution (IMI, ACA, NA, COI, FM, DOM, and Other categories). Thus, when measured specifically against corruption scandals⁷⁵, the percentage of investigative stories of corruption improves to slightly above 10% as shown in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1: Corruption scandals in the sampled newspapers (n= 615)

Categories (sources of corruption stories)	Frequency of Corruption scandals	% of corruption scandals	Corruption Investigating Authorities
Anti Corruption Agencies (ACA)	183	29.76%	
National (and State) Assemblies (NA)	134	21.79%	
Commissions of Inquiry	99	16.10%	
Other (OT)	115	18.70%	86.34%
Independent Media Investigations (IMI)	64	10.41%	
Foreign Media (FM)	15	2.44%	
Diaspora/Online Media (DOM)	5	0.81%	13.66%
Total Corruption Scandals	615	100.00%	100.00%

⁷³ *Daily Trust* 06/11/2010.

⁷⁴ As mentioned in chapter three, only corruption stories are considered. In Nigerian newspapers such stories often contain words and phrases like 'corruption', 'fraud', 'graft', 'embezzlement', 'bribe', 'loot', and their variants like 'corrupt', 'fraudulent', 'embezzled', 'bribery', 'thieves', etc.

⁷⁵ Please see chapters four and six for details on this.

Finally, various factors such as the degree of press freedom, media ownership, organizational or political economic structures of the press in respective countries are thought to explain a general trend of ‘investigative shortfall’ as Walton (2010: 18) put it. As we shall see, the shortfall of investigative reporting in most democracies as examined above is often explained by its peculiar economics of high transaction costs but little benefits for the media organizations that sponsor it, even if investigative stories also tend to have high social returns. As Hamilton (2016: 11) put it, original investigative content generates “great benefits for society, but offer smaller returns” for media organizations. Thus, if investigative reporting is already difficult and resource-intensive, it follows that 10% reports of corruption by Nigerian newspapers against total reports of corruption scandals can be quite significant, given that political and economic conditions within which the media operate might be more difficult than in countries in which Hamilton and others draw data. But what are these specific conditions for Nigeria and other developing democracies and to what extent does the general model of investigative reporting hold for investigative output in the Nigerian press and is any alternative model possible? I now turn to these questions by first examining how Nigerian journalists and editors explain the shortfall of investigative reporting in the press.

7. 3 Political and economic frameworks of investigative reporting in Nigeria:

As mentioned above, the amount and quality of investigative reporting is generally located within political and economic structures in which newspapers and other media operate. Nigerian journalists consider three broad such factors that curtail investigative output in the country: ineffectiveness of freedom of information legislation, corruption and other unethical practices within the media itself and political and advertiser influences on the press. I examine each of these in turn below.

(a) Ineffectiveness of freedom of information legislation:

Berliner (2014) has argued that FOI laws have both costs and benefits for political actors by increasing the cost of corruption. This implies that effective FOI laws complement the operating environment for journalists. About two-thirds of the respondents interviewed believe that the freedom of information act has had little or no impact on their ability to access official information. One respondent describes the impact of the law as “very, very abysmal”. Non-compliance can be outright, or through delay tactics by both government agencies and private bodies. At other times, public institutions claim the law exempts them, even if it did not, or claim that it is not binding on the states because it is a federal law. Some respondents believe the law itself is cumbersome and difficult to implement, and therefore does not “qualify as good law”, as another interviewee claims. However, the same reporter admitted he had not read “the final version” of it, but the general impression I got is that most journalists have not fully studied the law. An investigative reporter at one of the newspapers related a typical example of how the ineffectiveness of the law affects journalistic investigations. He said that he was trying to investigate non-remittance of royalties to government by multi-national companies in the oil and gas sector who possibly colluded with officials in the national oil company and regulatory agencies in the sector.⁷⁶ In trying to investigate further, he requested ten years of data from NNPC, DPR and FIRS⁷⁷, all government agencies that should have reliable information about oil remittances. But:

When I met each one of them, none of them was willing to come forth with the information. They all blanked out. So I had to invoke FOI. But

⁷⁶ He said he read this information in the Ribadu Report, which was a formal investigation into the sector chaired by a former anti-corruption chief, Nuhu Ribadu, and sponsored by NEITI, the sector watchdog.

⁷⁷ These are acronyms referring to agencies of Nigerian government: NNPC is Nigeria, National Petroleum Corporation, that is, the national oil company; DPR is the Department of Petroleum Resources, the regulatory agency which monitors NNPC; while FIRS is the Federal Inland Revenue Service, a federal tax collection agency.

it still did not work. They kept telling me they will but they never did. It was just a delay tactics to get me tired and all that. So... I had to redirect the story to non-compliance of government agencies with the FOI Act. There is a record that shows that even federal government agencies themselves do not comply with the law. It is a lame duck law. So that again limits what investigative journalists can do

Another respondent offers that government agencies are reluctant to comply with FOI requests because “there is always one or two corruption cases they are trying to cover up”. This suggests that by not releasing information to journalists in one case, public officials may be aiming to protect the overall system of corruption in government, a possibility in a context of systemic corruption. INTVWEE 2 however believes that it may be because public officials are wary that journalists might “sell” out information from FOI requests rather than for journalistic purposes, a practice that as we shall see appears common in Nigerian journalism. As he put it, “everybody is jittery when he is giving out information because he doesn’t know what you are going to do with it. So they will want to look at the law to see why they shouldn’t give those documents”. Moreover, ineffectiveness of the law is also due to the culture of “secrecy” in government inherited from colonial times. As one senior editor explains:

Well, there are many constraints to investigative reporting in our country. For example, the culture of secrecy is deeply engrained in the Nigerian public service, right from the colonial days. During the colonial days, almost every piece of paper in the bureaucracy was a secret. The law that they call the Official Secret Act. It has been consequentially repealed now by the Freedom of Information Act, but still civil servants all act under that constraint.

Finally, in most cases, the problem is not so much non-compliance by officials but because there is just nothing to disclose because no records exist in the first place, a point several respondents consider a major concern. As another respondent concludes: “so if the data is not available, it means that initially we have been disenfranchised, it means that there is a limit to how far you can go

as an investigative journalist". In other words, all the above illustrates the difficulties faced by enterprising reporters in their attempt to access information from public or private institutions when conducting investigative reports about issues of accountability.

(b) Brown Envelope Syndrome:

'Brown envelope journalism' or cash-for-news and similar practices are commonplace in Nigerian and African journalism, and elsewhere (Oberiri, 2016; Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe, 2012: 515; Kasoma, 2009:26; Lodamo and Skjerdal, 2009: 140-141; Rønning, 2009: 167; Ndangam, 2006: 179; Hasty, 2005a; 2005b). In Africa, Skjerdal (2010: 367) notes that research interest on the syndrome looks at the extent of its occurrence in respective countries, its causes, particularly the impact of poor economic conditions, or social and political influences, and discussion of ethical and professional implications of it. In a survey of 155 journalists in 18 media organizations in South Western Nigeria, Adeyemi (2013) finds that even though 64% of the reporters agree that 'brown envelope journalism' is unethical, 75% of them admit to engaging in it. A similar survey of 184 Lagos-based reporters finds that 61% engage in it, although 74% believe it does not influence their reporting, while a further 34% claim that even though poor salaries is a major cause of it, better pay will not necessarily reduce it (Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe, 2009). This confirms Nwabueze (2010) who finds from 116 journalists in five Nigerian cities that orientation of journalists is the major cause because journalists see nothing wrong with taking money from sources. However, other studies report that brown envelope in Nigerian journalism affects ethical considerations and objectivity in news coverage, and thus recommend various solutions such as better pay, more stringent monitoring of reporters and sanctions, and more professional education or awareness campaigns by professional unions (Gade et al, 2017; Oberiri, 2016;

Okoro and Chinweobo-Onuoha, 2013; Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe, 2012; Yusha'u, 2009; Omenuga and Oji, 2008; Akabogu, 2005). Yusha'u (2009: 162-163) finds from interviews with Nigerian reporters that such practices are manifested in clientelist relationships between journalists and sources, sometimes based on expectations regional and ethnic loyalties between journalists and political actors and thus curtailing investigative reporting.

This research finds several ways in which such practices directly affect investigative reporting. First, journalists often *sell* information they pick up during reporting processes or from colleagues in the newsroom to the very targets of journalistic investigations. Indeed, as one reporter explains, journalists often double as informants under the employ of businesses and advertisers, such that “your informant tells you there is negative information coming, and the guy will start calling the editor or the publisher, calling everybody, and start putting pressure”. A senior investigative reporter at one of the newspapers explains that this practice is one reason whistle blowers and informants do not have confidence in reporters. As this respondent put it,

Then a much more serious issue is when the operators in the industry don't even trust the journalist. Somebody may have information. Details that he can give to you as a journalist but he could say if I give this thing to that Journalist, he will go and sell it. There are some journalists who are materialistic. If you give them any information about the CBN Governor, the next morning it is on the CBN Governor's desk. If you give them these facts they will go and sell it.

To buttress this point, another investigative reporter at a different paper cited a specific example of a story he wrote about a Governor's misrepresentation of facts regarding public spending in his state, but which ended up not being published, “because individuals in the newsroom told the governor who then wanted to see the journalist who wrote the story so they can have a ‘discussion’”. One implication of this practice is that investigative reporters are

careful not to reveal information about their investigations to colleagues in the same newsroom, which in turn could undermine the effectiveness of team that the operational idea of an investigative desk suggests. In addition, journalists double, not as informants, but as “media consultants”, “assisting”, business clients about how to get favourable news into their own paper. As the reporter cited above says:

Consultancy services can mean when someone wanting the world to know the progress they are making in the industry they are, and they don't know how to go about it. You can counsel them, that okay, in this type of thing, this one you can do it through press release, and this one you can do it through press conferences and this one can be through facility tour.

Also, state correspondents and beat reporters are sometimes placed on the payroll of the state government or agency they report. Several respondents cited examples. INTVWEE 15 notes that “beat reporters are embedded” in the beats they report, making them inconvenient for investigative reporters to rely on, where travel proves expensive. INTVWEE 3, who claims experience of reporting from several states, said that while he was reporting from Kano, many reporters covering the state government were being paid ‘monthly gift’ by the state government, and wondered how such a journalist could balance the demands of watchdog “the stipend that he is getting?”. In other words, reporters themselves perhaps do as much to constrain press freedom as do regulatory or political influences on the press. Indeed, at least four senior editors believe that political and legal constraints on the press are minimal but achieved by other means. One of them observes:

I remember mentioning it at a seminar in Paris. I said, look you busy-body foreign NGOs who are so concerned with the arrest of journalists. Do you know that bribery and the brown envelope syndrome that we say in Nigeria does more damage than jailing? Because when you jail a journalist everybody will hear but if you go around bribing and they don't report what they should report, or they

distort the story or they suppress something; that is very damaging...
Otherwise, there is a lot of journalistic independence

(c) Political and advertiser influences:

Although overt or system-wide legal limitations do not exist, individual politicians and businesses do exert influence on the press in ways that could directly limit investigative reporting output. First, in addition to monetary inducement and bribery of reporters already discussed above, public officials and advertisers, especially the former, often try to intimidate field reporters doing investigative stories about them or their institutions. This could be verbal appeals, abuses or threats to discontinue an investigation or not to publish the story. As one of several respondents observes:

If an investigation is 'indictive' (sic) they try to stop. At times, they will call the chairman of the company and say look, I understand your company is doing this story. If they don't stop, I'm going to sue this company. But the chairman doesn't bulge. He wouldn't even call you to say what are you doing?

However, if verbal intimidation fails, officials often resort to a legal one. As one investigative reporter put it: "They could even resort to blackmail, intimidation and ultimately they could even resort to litigation. They could just slam unnecessary libel case that sometimes the court cases don't see the light of the day". While this statement points to legal harassment of reporters, it must be understood within a common occurrence in Nigerian politics whereby politicians frequently threaten legal cases against journalists and media organizations, or against other politicians, but mostly without seeing the threat through to end. Hardly any such libel cases are litigated; sometimes paperwork for them are not even filed in court. Perhaps such threats are no more than publicity stunts to refute a story until it dies down or another scandal appears to bury it.

Sometimes however, intimidation takes a violent turn. While speaking on this point, one senior editor said that: “even as we speak, I must tell you now the Nasarawa State Government, we don’t have a reporter there because of editorial concern. Our reporter was beaten up at a public function where the Governor was sitting. He didn’t raise a finger”. Moreover, political and advertiser influences go beyond verbal or legal intimidation of reporters or their media to ‘punishment’ of respective media organizations, by withdrawal of advertising. This is where distinctions between commercial and political influences on the press can be blurred, since government is in fact the biggest advertiser in the country, as respondents repeatedly point out.

The implication, then, is that government officials can exert not only political but also a commercial pressure on the press at the same time, although because of long-standing gains for press freedom, they tend to use the latter rather than the former. The senior editor quoted above, for instance, cited several examples where his newspaper was ‘punished’ by various government ministries and officials, “largely because of our investigative stories”, as he put it⁷⁸. In other words, government advertising, the largest source of revenue for the press, is at once an additional source of power and influence at the hands of government officials which they wield readily as a means of media control. These influences on the press are made worse by the poor capacity of the media and journalists, as well as the harsh economic climate for media business. The cost of news production is astronomical, since most inputs like newsprints, machinery and so on have to be imported, and in a volatile regime of exchange rates. A senior editor at another of the publications explains that newspapers are struggling to

⁷⁸ Another senior editor in the same paper related that at some time, a former Governor had ordered the withdrawal of the state’s advertising from his paper, “and I was told it was because I wrote one column about him about two or three years ago and he said since that column was allowed he would not”, the editor explained.

“get money for operations”, because, “inflation has been very high. You import almost everything. So the cost of production is very high”. A third editor, INTVWEE 13, goes as far as suggesting that government should subsidize newspaper production because revenues are offset by the costs of importing news prints, demurrage incurred at the ports, maintaining warehouse and distribution of newspapers. Consequently, newspapers employ fewer staff, many of them poorly trained. About one quarter of the interviewees claim poor capacity of reporters in terms of basic writing skills, ability to spot a good story and follow it up, to more specialist skills of researching for stories or interpreting data constitute a major limitation on investigative reporting. As INTVWEE 23 observes:

There are not enough good journalists. If you don't have a capacity to identify a good story, if you don't have the capacity to put one or two together, to put issues into perspective, there is no way you will do a good story that will impact the lives of people. There is no way you will do a good story that will make public officials and decision makers to respond to the complaints you have made and make amendments, because they don't understand what you are saying, because you are not even saying anything

In addition, reporters are paid poorly, if at all. Nigerian media are notorious for not paying their reporters salaries. Indeed, the issue of “welfare” of reporters, that is salaries, was a frequently cited theme in the interviews. For example, an editor at an online paper (INTVWEE 16) explained that “so when the newspaper is struggling to pay salary, it is difficult for that same paper to say do investigation. That is why people don't do it, they just do what they can to get by”. As to be expected, many explained corruption within the media itself from this perspective of poor pay. But this should be considered a dubious claim since several other respondents insisted brown envelope practices have more to do with individual orientation of journalists than poor ‘welfare’. Indeed, one senior investigative reporter reasons that lack of capacity of journalists does more to

limit investigative reporting in the press than challenges in the regulatory environment. In his words,

Now, if you talk about investigative reporting in Nigeria, the problem that journalists have doing investigation is not actually the legal restraints. It is actually the inadequate knowledge. It is not the legal constraint when journalists don't understand how to do it... And another issue is that even if you have the tip-offs, you don't have the skills to be able to dig further... Then, knowledge of various sectors is another problem. If you don't understand the petroleum sector you cannot write an investigative story in that sector.

7.4 Understanding investigative shortfall in the Nigerian press:

So far, we have examined the various ways in which organizational and wider political and economic structures shape and possibly limit the amount of investigative reporting in Nigerian newspapers. Berliner (2014: 481) has noted that the push for freedom of information legislation by journalists and civil society groups took almost 20 years to yield fruits by the passage of the law in 2011. But civil society organizations and journalists did not waiver, believing that the end will be well worth it. Furthermore, Ojebode (2011: 278) has observed that various sections of Nigerian FOI legislation explicitly mentioned its implications for investigative reporters and whistle-blowers, two key collaborators that were believed would help further the endless fight against corruption in the country. However, we find here that the law has yet proved ineffective because, as Hazel and Worthy (2010: 358) observe, FOI legislation requires accompanying cultural change in government towards openness, but which takes time to build. But perhaps even more fundamentally, legislation requires existing or new bureaucratic mechanisms for its implementation. And as Roberts (2006) notes, institutional capacity for implementing FOI laws can be enormous: expertise, facilities and databases, money to cover costs of processing requests, and so on. Indeed, Roberts (2006: 114-118) highlights the

example of Britain which adopted the law in 2000 but it was only effective five years later in 2005 to allow time for public campaigns and administrative capacity building before operation begins. In addition, enforcement of laws often requires an active, well-informed and well-resourced civil society ready to test the limits of the law or to monitor compliance. For example, Calland and Bentley (2013) show that the persistence and activism of civil society organizations and journalists is responsible for the modest success of the law in India and South Africa. But even in India, where FOI legislation is known as Right to Information Act (RITA), journalists still do not seem to use it much or it does not seem to be effective for investigative reporting purposes, at least not particularly for journalistic investigations of corruption. In their analysis of three English-language Indian newspapers over the five years following adoption of the law there, Relly and Schwalbe (2013: 294) find that just “2% of the 221 articles were from journalists’ investigative reports about corruption using the RTIA”. Thus, in his regression analysis of cross-sectional data for 191 countries, Nam (2012) finds that FOI legislation does not necessarily enhance press freedom in countries with weaker democratic institutions and poor resources for enforcing it. In other words, what journalists in Nigeria regard as non-compliance needs to be understood within the context of these discussions.

Moreover, we find that while newspapers are essentially free from political interference or legal harassment by politicians, the political and economic environment nonetheless curtail watchdog journalism, since politicians can exert influence in more subtle ways, in addition to the challenges of a developing economy for private media. These findings have implications for much research on press freedom and media ownership and their connections to watchdog journalism or corruption. Djankov et al (2003: 343-344), for instance, conduct regression analysis of a variety of media ownership data in 91 countries and find

that private ownership supports more press freedom. Also, in a regression analysis of Press Freedom Index (Freedom House) in 133 countries, Camaj (2013: 37) concludes that "media freedom is an important determinant of corruption, even after controlling for variables of horizontal accountability" such as the courts or parliaments. Similar research from public economics suggests that press freedom and media ownership are positively correlated with levels of official corruption. That is, the more private ownership, the higher the levels of press freedom in a country, which in turn results in lower corruption. (Camaj, 2013; Kalenborn and Lessmann, 2013; Nam, 2012; Whitten-Wooding and James, 2012; Shen and Williamson, 2005; Besley and Prat, 2006; Chowdhury, 2004; Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Djankov et al, 2003). But as the foregoing discussion of freedom of information legislation indicates, these assumptions are not so straightforward in the Nigerian case at least. First, private media are established to make profit, which, as McQuail (2005: 99-100) notes favours larger and richer advertising markets and therefore draws resources away from less profitable but more public oriented contents like investigative reporting. Secondly, press freedom is frequently understood in relation to the state (Kasoma, 1995). But as we find here, the state and its agencies generally do not interfere much with the press in Nigeria. But politicians and government agencies nonetheless exert possibly much more influence by subtler and presumably more effective means such as withdrawal of advertising which government controls and inducement of reporters, and all in a harsh business climate and poor pay for reporters. In this sense, the focus on political and legal aspects of press freedom potentially works only to "regress" (to borrow the same econometric term) other explanatory factors for press behavior in contexts such as Nigeria.

Additionally, investigative reporting appears particularly unsuitable for organization of the media based on the profit motive, although Djankov et

above finds little evidence that public ownership of the media favours better public communication. However, for media, investigative reporting requires considerable resource commitment in time and money; and yet with little guarantee for a story (Feldstein, 2017; Fink and Schudson, 2014). When it does lead to investigative stories however, it can have enormous impact for the society in terms of reforms (Hamilton, 2016), although this too can be blunted by legal and public relations tactics of corporate organizations (Raphael et al, 2004). Moreover, in the long-term decline of journalism generally, investigative reporting is hardest-hit in terms of budget cuts, job losses, whole dissolution of investigative units and reduced membership of professional associations (Starkman, 2014; Walton, 2010; Stock, 2009). All this further explains relatively low amount of investigative reporting in the press. Indeed, Hamilton (2016) offers an interesting ‘economist’ perspective of investigative reporting to explain its rarity in news. For Hamilton, investigative reporting is the real deal in news; the ‘product differentiation’ in market terms. Beat reporting and agency copies only help to fill up space (*ibid*: 18-19). It poses a fundamental economic problem for media organizations however. Like drilling for oil, he claims, investigative journalism involves high transaction costs, is based on tips and conjecture, and may not even yield desired results in the end. But unlike oil drilling which if successful yields measurable proceeds for the company, investigative reports are public goods which cannot be monetized directly by media organizations. The whole society benefits from the reforms investigative reporting engenders, not just subscribers who pay for news. This therefore is a ‘product failure’, since it benefits others, but not the firm that produces it (*ibid*: 23-26). This fundamental economic problem of investigative journalism discourages media organizations from engaging in it, despite its huge benefits

to society.⁷⁹ The question, then, is that to what extent does this general economic model explain investigative reporting output in Nigeria as observed above? My answer is that yes, and more. Political economic structures within which the press operates in Nigeria can, and do, limit the amount of investigative reports in newspapers, as the findings above amply demonstrate. However, as I understand it here, constraints of political economic structures have had one major consequence for investigating reporting in the Nigerian press. Investigative reporting occupies only one end of a wider spectrum of disclosing corruption in Nigeria. At the other end lie the corruption investigating agencies. When the scale of corruption disclosed is low, that is, for petty corruption, as we shall see, investigating reporting is present and active. However, when the scale of corruption is higher and involves more elite actors and therefore more clandestine, investigative reporting recedes to the background and at which point, corruption investigating agencies become more active and take the lead in disclosing corruption in the press. That is, for the specific case of exposing corruption in Nigerian newspapers, both independent journalism and information subsidy are to be understood as part of the same political culture of disclosing corruption in Nigeria, although with a division of labour of some sorts. Journalists and newspapers can and do investigate and report corruption to the extent that structural constraints observed in this chapter allow. But the outcomes of journalistic investigations of corruption tend to be fewer independent coverage in published news reports, at least in comparison to reports of corruption from information subsidy sources. This is illustrated by the data we have seen so far. Just about 10% of actual corruption cases are independently investigated by journalists and their newspapers. Yet, journalistic

⁷⁹ Hamilton endeavours to calculate in dollar terms through several sophisticated examples the real value of investigative journalism to society.

investigation of corruption is not only low in terms of quantity of coverage. It is also low in terms of the *scale* of corruption involved in the stories independently reported, in comparison to those sourced through information subsidy practices. Another way of explaining this point is that corruption-investigating-agencies (CIAs) supply *more* stories of corruption than newspapers investigate themselves by 90% of total corruption coverage, but equally significant, they supply more of the *bigger* cases of scandals than newspapers investigate. In effect, for stories of corruption in Nigerian newspapers, information subsidy works in two ways: both in terms of the *quantity* of scandal news, but also in terms of the *scale* of corruption involved in the stories supplied. In other words, I elaborate on the concept of strong watchdogs, weak investigators earlier advanced and discussed in chapter five by comparing the scale of corruption involved in stories independently reported or subsidized.

Table 7.1 above shows a *quantitative* analysis, the number or frequency of scandals reported. But if we consider the *scale of corruption* exposed, a different comparative picture emerges. This is important because there are different types of corruption, and for Nigeria specifically, certain kinds of corruption are an aspect of everyday life for most citizens, unlike stealing \$6 billion from security budget that John Kerry referred to in his speech at Davos. Petty corruption involves different sets of actors and differing social and political contexts and might yet have different impacts on society. In short, in the next section, I try to make sense of the question: what kinds of corruption are investigated by the press? I do this through a comparative analysis of scandals coded in the IMI category, that is, corruption stories originating from independent journalism and those investigated by other agencies and supplied to the press through information subsidy practices or channels (press release, briefing, leaks, etc). In this instance however, the focus of analysis is not *quantity*

or number of stories but the scale of corruption involved in each case. This is useful because as Hamilton (2016: 10) observes, while investigative journalism may be episodic and uncommon in the press, its significance to democratic governance does not lie simply in the number of investigations published, but also in its quality and impact, since a single investigative story can result in a massive impact for society, resulting from policy changes the story could inspire. Also, Lublinski et al (2016) could identify just 12 investigative stories in five African countries in 2010 (Kenya, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire), but focus, not on the limited number of these stories but on their possible impacts on governance processes, of which they identify four, including getting an issue on the public agenda, helping to solve an immediate problem, and triggering structural changes in the short term (*ibid*: 1081). From these therefore, I assume that independent journalistic disclosures of grand corruption may well have more impact on governance structures and systems than exposure of petty corruption or lower scale corruption, which most people already know about anyway, given that it is widespread in societies like Nigeria. More importantly, exposure of grand corruption in this sense implies a more active overall watchdog performance for the press.

7.5 Hard and soft model of investigative reporting in Nigerian press:

Corruption is often distinguished in terms of its scale: the status of persons involved, and amounts extracted through illicit practices, as a measure of the trust breached or power abused. As Blackburn et al (2006: 2462) observe, corruption can “occur on various scales, in many shapes and forms, and at all levels within public office”. Also, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016: 11-12) distinguish between petty and grand corruption, although the two may be linked in a way that one furthers the other. Petty corruption is more widespread in society and “easier for citizens to observe and experience”, such as paying bribes

to access public services in schools, hospitals and so on, or other forms of extortion by officials of the state. As such it is usually perpetrated by officials on the lower rungs of the bureaucracy. Petty corruption is everywhere in Nigeria and is not necessarily limited to officials of government. Teachers or officials of private schools and hospitals, fuel attendants, mechanics, bank officials also engage in various forms of it. On the other hand, grand corruption involves higher-level officials such as ministers, lawmakers, heads of agencies etc. Also, grand corruption involves much larger sums and more secrecy. Rose-Ackerman and Paflika note that grand corruption ranges from contract inflation, kickbacks for awarding contracts, licenses or foreign direct investment projects to outright embezzlement or looting of public resources directly by highly placed officials or their cronies, or payments to lawmakers to make favourable legislations. Thus, it is more difficult for citizens to observe or experience directly. Moody-Stuart (1997: 2) observes that for developing countries, grand corruption of the sort perpetrated by ministers and heads of state tend to be more damaging both economically and socially. Indeed, when Nigerians complain or talk about corruption in the country, they tend to focus mostly on varying forms of grand corruption, perhaps because it is this form of corruption that is regularly portrayed in the media or investigated by anti-corruption agencies or commissions of inquiry. Therefore, to what extent do Nigerian newspapers independently report this sort of corruption?

In an important sense, corruption is the object of investigative reporting and is implied in most definitions of it, however differently conceived by scholars. Investigative journalism entails the press digging into or discovering and exposing wrongdoing or abuses of power by officials entrusted to act on behalf of the public, which otherwise would have gone unreported. And for this reason, it is called 'accountability reporting' (Starkman, 2014). For example, Lanosga's

definition which we adopt here states explicitly that it is “in-depth reporting about public affairs that involves wrongdoing, failure or social problems brought to light by journalists” (Lanosga, 2015a: 369). Yet, studies of investigative reporting rarely consider what kinds of corruption or wrongdoing is investigated by journalists. Coronel (2010: 112) notes that the “target” of investigative exposes can range from low-level to high-level public officials and the wrongdoing exposed could be small scale or large scale, “from petty officials like traffic policemen or clerks, but can just as well be on high-level political corruption involving millions, even billions of dollars, as in the case of dictators and kleptocracies in developing countries”. This is significant because it moves investigative reporting from abstract conceptualizations to the very specific social context where corruption takes place. Furthermore, it highlights which forms of corruption journalists can independently report, given variations of structural contexts, and since journalistic initiative is at the core of investigative journalism. In this sense, taking the scale of corruption into consideration in actual practice of journalism could be useful to better conceptualize investigative reporting. In their analysis of 757 investigative prize entries during 1976-2012, Lanosga and Martin (2017: 8-9) find that 47.7% of the stories are about “government wrongdoing or problems”, while 29.7% involve actors in the private sector. Similarly, Carson (2014: 734) finds just 3 instances of corporate wrong doing out of 45 investigative stories in five Australian broadsheets over 1956-2011. These are like our findings in Table 6.3 above that 59.38% of investigative stories in the sample involve wrongdoing in the federal government, 23.44% for state and local governments, and 9.38% for wrongdoing in the private sector. These indicate which sectors of society are more commonly investigated by journalists, or as Carson concludes, “investigations of corporate power are rare in the news” (*ibid*). However, Relly

and Schwalbe (2013: 291) provides a useful example of analysis of scale of corruption in investigative reporting samples. In their analysis of 221 investigative articles from three Indian newspapers, they find that 56.56% of the stories are about 'general corruption' in which the wrongdoing is not specified, 23.08% on 'grand corruption' involving high-level government officials, 10.41% on 'petty corruption' by low-level officials, 4.52% on 'political corruption' in which powerful actors sought to bend or change the rules for private gain and 5.4% of the stories were on 'multiple types of corruption', that is, a combination of any of the previous four types. In my view, such findings represent a significant shift in most empirical studies of investigative reporting as they indicate the kinds of corruption reported and therefore a more detailed analysis of media performance.

(a) Comparative analysis of IMI and CIA corruption stories:

Table 7.1 above shows that a total of 615 breaking news of corruption scandals were reported by the four newspapers combined during the 12-year period, 64 of which are investigative stories, or 10.41% of this total. However, of the 64 investigative articles, *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* reported 31 and 20 respectively, or a combined 79.69% of total between these two papers alone. *Thisday* and *The Guardian* reported 9 and 4 stories respectively, or 20.31% of total investigative coverage between them over the same period.

Tables 7.2 and 7.3 below provide brief details for most of the investigative articles in *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* respectively. (Although I coded the stories by simple frequency counts to each category, I also took notes for majority of the stories coded, per chance additional details might be useful as illustrative examples or further analysis. I attach all the notes in the form of tables as Appendix C. They provide an expansive view of the various corruption scandals,

follow up stories and narrative of corruption stories and their various categories, and a hence additional illustration of the coding procedure).

Table 7.2 Brief Notes on Investigative Media Investigations (IMI): *The Punch*

1. IMI report on extortion by the security guards at the British Embassy, IMI, 15/05/03
2. MI on fraud and mismanagement of ticket sales in the Mass Transit Schemes, IMI, 20/06/03
3. IMI report on corruption within Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Bayelsa State chapter, 3m gift from the Governor IMI, 07/08/03
4. Punch investigates 16 abandoned projects worth N583m in the south east, IMI, 24/09/03
5. Punch investigates N4.1bn fraud in banking sector. Really sketchy story, but with elements of investigation, probably a leak, IMI, 30/09/03
6. Punch investigates N1.3bn secret annual Jumbo pay to special advisers of the president, IMI, 21/06/04
7. Punch investigates illegal allocation of land in Lagos state, IMI, 19/11/05
8. Punch investigates car gift to 18 legislators of the Oyo Assembly for removing Gov, IMI 12/04/06
9. Punch investigate police stations charging money for writing reports for complainants, IMI, 12/05/06
10. Punch investigates bribery of INEC officials in Ekiti elections IMI, 08/04/08
11. Punch investigations reveal N102m scam over police dogs in the Nigeria Police, IMI, 22/11/08
12. Punch further investigation of banks under CBN/NDIC investigations, IMI, 02/02/09
13. Punch investigates N4bn asphalt plants abandoned in FERMA offices, IMI, 16/03/09
14. Punch investigates case of \$10m bribery by multinational oil companies to legislators to stall Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). Story not as detailed as would be expected, probably a leak IMI, 11/05/11
15. Punch investigations finds that 66 companies on the Nigeria Stock Exchange, NSE have not declared dividends to their shareholders since 2008, not much detail in story, probably from a published or internal report IMI, 23/05/11
16. Punch investigates cost of President Jonathan's travels estimated at N3.35bn in 2 and half years, IMI, 07/07/12. Not coded as date not in sample

Table 7.3 Brief Notes on Independent Media Investigations (*Daily Trust* IMI)

1. IMI report on missing 40 beds at Asokoro General Hospital (IMI, 20/05/02)
2. IMI report on N250m Nigeria Airways land grab by Minister of Aviation, Kema Chikwe (IMI, 02/06/03)
3. IMI on discrepancies in financial accounts in handing over notes of former Speaker Ghali Na'aba to new Speaker, Bello Masari (IMI, 20/06/03)
4. IMI report on corruption at the Ajaokuta Steel Complex (IMI, 20/07/03)
5. IMI report on corruption at the National Hospital, Abuja (IMI, 31/08/03)
6. IMI report on abuse of monetization policy by civil servants retiring with official vehicles (IMI, 21/02/04)
7. IMI report on allegations of N50m bribe to senators to support third term, IMI, 12/05/06 (probably a leak)
8. IMI report on illegal allocation of 300 plots by former FCT minister in the 24 hours before vacating office, IMI, 20/04/08
9. IMI report on N6bn water contracts in Kano without water; IMI, 20/04/08
10. IMI report on Governors spending N35m on adverts during President Yar'adua's birthday, IMI, 19/07/08
11. IMI report on N702m on missing Hajj funding intervention, IMI, 16/11/08
12. IMI report on INEC payments to non-existing political parties, IMI, 28/12/08
13. IMI report on corruption in Federal Housing Authority, corruption evident in story, no names IMI, 28/12/08;
14. IMI report on Governors globe-trotting with state funds while states suffer, IMI, 03/05/09
15. IMI report on grounded aircraft at several barracks of Nigerian Airforce despite huge annual budgets IMI, 09/05/09
16. IMI report on N300m squandered on medical bills of the governor, IMI, 20/06/09
17. IMI report on Kano Governor Shekarau's N50m Sallah gift to politicians
18. IMI report on top govt officials lobbying to have their cronies buy up NITEL, IMI, 12/04/12
19. IMI report on lobbyists delaying submission of report of House investigation on subsidy scandal, IMI, 18/04/12
20. IMI report on fake hill demolition airport contract in Asaba, Delta State, IMI, 24/04/12
21. IMI report on N1.6bn Abuja CCTV contract, IMI, 06/05/12
22. IMI report on Ibori making money while in prison, 12/05/12, IMI, 12/05/12
23. IMI report on mismanagement of N14bn natural resources acct by previous presidents, IMI, 23/07/12
24. IMI report on N140bn silos without grains, IMI, 21/10/12

We see from these brief details that the majority of the stories investigated by the newspapers (all in IMI category) are on the lower scale of corruption in Nigeria, both in terms of the amounts or other value extracted or attempted through corrupt means and in terms of individuals and institutions involved. Indeed, given the general extent of corruption in Nigeria, most of the actors involved in these stories could be said to belong to the fringes of corruption in Nigeria. In short, most of the stories are of petty corruption involving lower to mid-level officials or smaller sums, or of cases that could be investigated or inspired by personal observation, even if that does not take way the independent initiative of the journalists. For example, of the combined 40 stories in the two tables above, only a handful could be described as 'grand corruption' in the context of Nigeria above. Some, in fact, are quite 'petty' cases (in the sense of being common and small scale) such security guards extorting bribes from visa seekers, officials stealing money from ticket sales of a public transport, or union leaders mismanaging a small donation from a politician, or for that matter bribing officials of the electoral commission in a state bye-election (*The Punch*, stories number 1, 2, 3, 9 and 10 in Table 7.2 above), or missing beds in hospitals (*Daily Trust*, story number 1). These are everyday forms of corruption in Nigeria and happen openly at every conceivable hour of the day. Furthermore, investigative stories of abandoned projects (story numbers 4, 13 in *The Punch* (Table 7.2) and numbers 9, 20, 24 in *Daily Trust* (Table 7.3), as well as several others about the reckless and unaccountable spending by political office holders (*The Punch* numbers 6, 8, 16 and *Daily Trust* 6, 10, 14, 16, 17) are all easily observable by most citizens as well, as they form part of the everyday patrimonial structure of the state itself. The point is that such forms of corruption are hardly secret in Nigeria, and therefore does not require much digging as journalists would suppose, although they still count as investigative

stories and are important. Other stories in the tables above that involve higher scale of corruption such as bribery allegations against legislators for tempering a bill, could well have been achieved through leaks by “aggrieved” insiders, again, illustrating the significance of sources to investigative reporting everywhere where. Speaking on this, one respondent- a senior editor at one of the papers- is of the view that:

Well, there is nothing wrong with that. Fighting corruption is a collaborative approach. There are agencies, it is just like fighting crime generally. There are agencies that are specialized to do that and they have the authority and the means to get information more than the media can get. Okay, if a newspaper discovers the story about a fraud. How do you think they can get it? There is virtually only one way. Somebody within the organization leaks it to you. Of course, it is actually the only way. Which is why if the corrupt DGs in the ministries ensure that the money is shared properly and everybody is happy, the newspapers are not going to hear about it. Usually it is when you are lucky you have one upright person who refused to take part or more commonly there was a problem with the sharing of the proceeds of the corrupt act and somebody was short changed. So he will now speak to the newspapers...

One illustration of the point this respondent is making is that the scale of corruption exposed independently by the newspapers in all the stories above put together, does not compare to even a single case of corruption investigated by anti-corruption agencies or commissions of inquiry set up by government, for example, the case of \$214 million exposed by the ICPC as mentioned earlier, or for that matter of the \$10 billion case of corruption investigated by a public hearing of the House of Representatives. Moreover, the statement above also illustrates the significance of sources and tips to journalistic investigations of corruption or wrongdoing. For example, in their content analyses of investigative reporting in the Slovenian press, Kovacic and Erjavec (2011: 329) observe that Slovenian reporters use what they call “semi-investigative reporting” which entails “creating an image of investigative reporting, rather

than actually performing it". Reporters do this, Kovacic and Erjavec contend, by deploying strategies like "factism", which involves using "excessive and overly detailed data" without interpreting same, extensive citing of authoritative official sources in the stories, over-reliance on anonymous sources, and appeal to common knowledge and common sense (ibid: 334-336). Furthermore, Lublinski et al (2016) conclude that a "decisive element of investigative journalism in Sub-Saharan Africa seems to be the involvement of and the interaction with other societal non-journalist actors". In other words, perhaps due to more strenuous constraining factors in developing democracies, investigative reporters tend to rely on non-media sources than journalistic enterprise, and for good reasons as I have shown through the past few chapters. However, investigative reporting is generally source-dependent, regardless of status of democracy. Lanosga and Martin (2017: 9-11) earlier cited above, find that tips from sources account for 34.9% of the award entries, while journalistic enterprise make up 46.6% of the stories. They note further that 90% of the stories cited documentary sources in addition to human resources, which in comparison to the Nigerian case underlies the importance of records and data bases, as we have discussed earlier. In this sense, it is not surprising that stories of higher-scale corruption in the tables above appear to have been triggered by tips from sources. Even then, the stories lack the sort of details and in-depth reporting one would expect from such stories. In contrast, the lower-scale stories were sufficiently detailed, often running into several pages. Overall, there appears to be a marked difference in the scale of corruption reported independently by newspapers and those sourced from the CIAs like anti-corruption commissions and parliaments. Newspapers and journalists do much of their investigative reports around small scale and readily observable forms of corruption. In other words, newspapers investigate the 'soft' cases of

corruption, for the most part, while established authorities investigate the ‘hard’ cases of corruption in Nigeria, which newspapers then actively and prominently report. The distinction between the two is not fixed however, as there are overlaps. This point is further supported by other kinds of investigative reports observed in the newspapers and by the examples of previous investigative reports that several respondents claimed to have done during my discussions with them. During the coding, I observed many other instances of investigative reporting, in terms of journalistic enterprise and possible impact, but the issues investigated were not ‘corruption’ as described above. Some of these stories are what Fink and Schudson call “social enterprise” stories in which the reporter aims to highlight the social conditions of a specific group, a good case of giving voice to the voiceless. Examples of these were on ‘motherless babies’ home’ in a northern state, ‘the agony of patients at a Kaduna Hospital’, (*Daily Trust*) or of ceaseless ‘electricity outages’, of drug addiction among youths in *Thisday* and *The Punch* respectively. In conclusion, the foregoing completes the picture of strong watchdogs but weak investigators role of the Nigerian press earlier discussed.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion:

8.1 Introduction:

In this concluding chapter, I first review the premise and evidence of this study, as well as the specific areas it contributes to existing literature. In particular, I argue that given certain national circumstances, and more importantly, given the specific context of corruption news, information subsidy enhances, rather than compromises the fourth estate role of the press. In other words, information subsidy is not always a bad thing. In addition, I argue that strands of literature on scandal reporting and those in other areas which consistently find correlations between press freedom and corruption reduction could look beyond quantifiable variables to other equally salient aspects of a country's political culture which may impact on revelations of corruption in the press. I conclude the chapter by highlighting the limitations of the research and areas for further questions for future research.

For African countries like Nigeria, scholarly debates around democratization have focused on several key areas, among them the process of regime change, and following that, the performance of the new regimes. Democratization is said to have followed a bottom-up path of have grassroots mobilizations against the authoritarian state, championed by the press and other opposition groups within civil society (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997). But since the African state itself is characterised by neopatrimonialism, in which it is not only authoritarian but also corrupt, democratic transition entails both rolling back authoritarianism and reducing corruption. Indeed, discourses of political freedoms and rights, as well as those of accountability and good governance, were a focal aspect of the civil mobilizations that dislodged single-party or military regimes that littered across much of Africa in the decade following independence up to the late

1980s. By implication, the role of the press in this process is then to further both democratic development and corruption reduction by exposing it and demanding governmental action against it (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011b; Lynch and Crawford, 2011). On the one hand, the media is or should be an anti-corruption watchdog against the African (and Nigerian) state, and on the other, it is and should be a patron of democratic development by promoting values such as rule of law, human rights, accountability and constitutionalism (Tettey, 2001). This programmatic idea (Mamdani, 1996) of the press promoting democratic values and change, and of ensuring state accountability is not restricted to Africa however. Jebril, Loveless and Stetka (2015) demonstrate that it is also the focus of much research and policy on media and democratization in other regions, including Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In Nigeria particularly, newspapers are said to have had a long history of confrontation against the state, and especially of corruption within it (Oso, 2013; Olukotun, 2004; 2002; Agbaje, 1993). Local press power, it is claimed, helped to successfully dislodge colonial power in the 1960s, just as it did three decades later in dislodging the military and ‘ushering’ in democracy. But at the same time, it has also fought against corruption and promoted accountability and human rights, even if, when occasion demanded, by going underground (Ojebode, 2011; Ojo, 2007; Olukotun, 2004; 2002; 2000; Ojo, 2003).

Yet, these are a ‘refreshed’, rather than a new set of arguments. The idea that the press expands political rights and freedoms and champions accountability on behalf of citizens is as old as modern democratic theory and practice. It is also nearly universally influential, imagined, if not practiced, virtually everywhere. It forms the bedrock of much scholarship on press freedom and watchdog journalism, and by implication, for much political communication research. It finds expression and articulation in national constitutions and legislations,

independent reports and commissions on the press, and forms a core of professional journalism in most countries, in theory, if not in practice (Weaver and Willnat, 2012). Yet, its application to contexts other those of its origins, broadly defined, has tended to be problematic, often traumatic, as Omenuga (2004) and Thompson (2007) argue in the case of the role of the press in ethnic conflicts in Nigeria and Rwanda respectively. But the more significant question, for our purposes here, is how and to what extent has democracy fared in Africa and Nigeria so far after two decades? For the most part, this question is posed to and answered for institutions like legislatures and political parties, or democratic practices such as elections. In general, democratic performance leaves much to be desired, as African democracies are described with similar adjectives as are most third wave democracies elsewhere (Collier and Levitsky, 1997). Omotola (2009a), for example, describes Nigeria's case as a 'garrison' democracy in which the executive uses all means, fair and foul to rig elections and undermine legislative and judicial independence. Hence, the new democracy looks more like the military past than a democratic present. Furthermore, others contend that the problem with democratic consolidation in the country is simply and squarely, corruption, since, this argument goes, corruption erodes popular legitimacy, particularly at the grassroots level of governance (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010; Ogundiya, 2010a; 2010b; Fagbadebo, 2007; Omotola, 2006). In short, any notion of a democratic media in Africa requires situating it in the wider context of democratization and corruption reduction. Hence, we asked the central question of how and to what extent Nigerian newspapers report corruption and what specific part, investigative journalism plays in that coverage. We also asked related questions such as how Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting, the impact of freedom

of information legislation and specific aspects of Nigeria's political culture in the coverage of corruption in the country.

8.2: Empirical evidence:

To approach these questions, we analysed 16, 613 front page news stories published in a randomly selected sample of 2746 newspaper from four national dailies in Nigeria (*Daily Trust, The Guardian, The Punch, and Thisday*) from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2012, in addition to 24 in-depth interviews and 8 weeks of newsroom observation. We find that of the 16, 613 stories analysed, corruption is the subject of 1,345 of them, meaning that coverage of corruption is over 8% of total frontpage news and one-third of total lead stories. Nearly 10% of the sampled newspapers carries two or more corruption on the same front page. Coverage of corruption is slightly above average in three of the newspapers, and below average in *The Guardian* in terms of frequency and prominence as lead stories. This indicates that most of the stories, but especially the scandals, are generated from the same sources through routine journalistic practices, rather than from different sources as would be expected where media competition and independent journalism are the driving force for reporting corruption. However, that corruption is not the only issue in Nigerian politics and society that merit front page attention, these findings illustrate that coverage of corruption is reasonably high in the newspapers. Over the study period, we find steady increases and significant variation from one year to another in newspaper coverage of corruption. Nearly two-thirds of all corruption stories (62.30%) were reported during 2005-2009. Coverage also varies significantly by type of corruption stories. Combined, follow-ups and narrative of corruption stories account for more than half the total corruption coverage (54.28%), further indicating the significance of corruption issues in Nigerian newspaper agenda. Stories of alleged or actual corruption or scandals

make up 45.72% of the total coverage. In addition, most of the scandals were generated by the investigations and reports of corruption-investigating-authorities, such as anti-corruption agencies, national and state assemblies, ad-hoc commissions of inquiries etc. These sources account for 86.34% of all scandals, or 39.48% of total corruption coverage in the sample. Investigative reporting of corruption by the four newspapers contribute just 10.41% of corruption scandals, or 4.76% of all corruption news, indicating a low investigative output. Equally significant, the scale of corruption in the stories sourced from CIAs tend to be higher than those independently investigated by journalists, illustrating the salience of powerful institutional sources in generating corruption scandals.

In addition to these, Nigerian journalists understand investigative reporting in precisely much the same ways as their Anglo-American counterparts, that is, as a form of journalism in which the journalist demonstrates enterprise and initiative, requires 'digging' or doing 'research' to discover information about wrongdoing in the public interest. Being part of overall British colonial heritage, this is not surprising as Nigerian print journalism has long imbued liberal watchdog professional values, and journalists are exposed to British and American journalism models through journalism education, on the job training and cross-national networking. The journalists also claim that they enjoy significant autonomy from their editorial superiors and proprietors, although one respondent recalls an instance of editorial interference within the newspaper over an investigative story against a Governor's spending claims. Furthermore, investigative stories are initiated by editors, tip-offs from whistle blowers as well as through personal observations or through sources cultivated that journalists have cultivated in strategic centers of news. But operationally speaking, investigative journalism is not much institutionalized in the four

newspapers studied. Of the 24 journalists and editors interviewed and several more encountered during newsroom observation, just four reported being full-time investigative reporters, all of them at one of the publications, the only one of the four publications with an investigative desk. The rest combine investigative reporting with regular beat reporting. There are no separate budgets specifically for investigative reporting, while investigative reporters earn much the same salaries and benefits as all other journalists. Externally, investigative reporting is constrained by three broad factors: ineffectiveness of freedom of information legislation, particularly the lack information and record-keeping, corruption within journalist itself, and intimidation or inducement by politicians, businesses or institutions. In consequence, just 4.76% of overall corruption coverage and 10.41% of scandal stories were independently investigated by the newspapers. However, this reflects a general trend of low investigative out in several other countries, including those with more established democratic systems. As Fink and Schudson (2014) claim, investigative reporting is a rarity in the news.

Journalism and the press have long been connected to disclosures of corruption and to its reform, as both political communication and other social science literature on corruption amply indicates (Holmes, 2015: 11; Johnston, 2014: 21; Camaj, 2013: 21; Mulgan, 2000: 563). For example, Hamilton (2016) refers to investigative reporters as ‘democracy’s detectives’ whose task is to uncover abuses of power or governance failure to bring about policy reforms. Similarly, Salminen (2013: 69) identifies the media as one of four “watchdog institutions” that have historically contributed to curbing corruption in Finland. The role of the media within this structure, he notes, is to “expose integrity violations through investigative journalism”, to create public awareness about the dangers of corruption, to spark debate about corruption in government and policy

circles, and to compel authorities to act where allegations of corruption are made (ibid: 72). However, as this research demonstrates, the media depends on external actors for much of corruption it exposes, through processes of information subsidy, particularly in a social and political context such as Nigeria's, where the effective capacity of the press to conduct investigations into high profile 'integrity violations', to borrow Salminen's phrase above, is severely constrained by structural factors like a lack of basis data about governance actions and processes.

8.3 Research contribution:

The present study contributes to three areas of existing research, most obviously in the idea of information subsidy and its implications for democratic media performance. As noted earlier, the relationships between journalists and sources have always been a complicated one. At one end, scholars understand this relationship as consensual or based an exchange model but in which sources who supply information to journalists hold the upper hand, while journalists, in turn, are no more than passive recipients. Herbert Gans' (1979) much quoted metaphor of a tango dance in which sources lead typifies this position. At the other end, journalists are said to be more active and adversarial, and therefore, have more power than sources over the news they produce (Eriksson and Östman, 2013: 305; Davis, 2009: 205-206). An interesting conceptualization of this journalist-source relationship is Gandy's (1982) idea of information subsidy. In this, public relations and other sources seeking media publicity subsidize the costs of news production and enhance profitability for the media by supplying journalists with the news they need through news releases, news briefings, facility visits, lobbying and so on (in Davis, 2009: 206;). More recent research speaks of information subsidy through disapproving labels 'passive journalist' 'churnalism', 'public relations democracy', 'crisis', etc (Jackson and Moloney,

2016; Franklin, 2011; Reich, 2010; Davies, 2009; Lewis et al, 2008a; 2008b; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008; Bro, 2008; Davis, 2000). However, other than in a few cases, studies critical of information subsidy rarely consider the specificity of the news subsidized (Kiousis et al; 2015: 365-366; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008; Kiousis et al, 2006: 267-268). But as Carlson (2009: 539) observes, there is need to “probe special cases” of news and “distinct types of sourcing”. This research fills that gap by studying information subsidy in the case of newspaper coverage of corruption scandals in Nigeria. Furthermore, as the labels used to describe the consequences of information subsidy (churnalism, crisis, passive journalist) imply, it is thought to undermine the watchdog performance of the press. However, this research finds that this is not always the case. We find that 90% of corruption scandals are subsidized for newspapers by anti-corruption agencies, adhoc panels, congressional investigations, courts, foreign media etc. However, journalists find such sources more reliable and credible for exposing corruption than independent sources. Also, citizens tend to find these institutions and sources more effective for petitioning against corruption, while corrupt politicians themselves respond to these institutions than they do to independent journalistic inquiry. Indeed, Lanosga and Martin (2016: 11) find that investigative reports initiated by tips from sources tend to have more impact in terms of policy changes than those independently initiated by journalistic enterprise. In this sense, information subsidy may well enhance, rather than compromise watchdog role of the press. Third, information subsidy does not always preclude the possibility of watchdog journalism entirely and journalists are not always as passive as previously assumed, as several existing studies confirm. For example, in his process model of news production, based on interview and content analysis data, Reich (2006) contends that story initiative alternates between sources and journalists at different points in the

news production process: “sources lead first, journalists thereafter” (ibid: 497). Similarly, Eriksson and Östman (2013) report that journalists are more passive when interacting face-face with politicians during press conferences to ensure steady news supply, but become more active and independent at the point of writing the story. Also, Örebro (2002) find that while local reporters depend on municipal officials for most of their political news, there is nonetheless, a form of “mutual control”, between local politicians and reporters, resulting in four types of journalism. For documentary and promotional journalism, municipal politicians are more active, while journalists are more active in watchdog stories by seeking out additional, even counteracting perspectives to those supplied by the municipal actors. We find similar evidence to those above. While Nigerian journalists depend mostly on corruption investigating agencies for most coverage of corruption scandals, they nonetheless demonstrate watchdog functions. Journalists are aware of the broader politics of corruption and anti-corruption, both within and beyond the CIAs and in response exercise discretion over what subsidized stories to publish and how. Furthermore, they appear to monitor these agencies by keeping certain corruption cases in the media agenda, particularly those cases that prove politically *inconvenient* for these agencies themselves, given that they too have their own limitations. As a former head of one of the anti-corruption agencies explains:

Generally, the Nigerian media is vibrant when it comes to corruption issues. They are not solely dependent on anticorruption agencies as sources because most times, the news they get from those institutions are about cases that are being investigated... Often times, these are cases that are already under investigation. Take for example the case involving Fashola for the past two months⁸⁰. It is a media thing. They

⁸⁰ Former Governor of Lagos, Babatunji Raji Fashola (2007-2015), now Minister of Power and Housing (2015-).

picked it up and pursue it and this is what happens to a lot of politicians including this whole thing about Jonathan. Is there any agency investigating Jonathan⁸¹? No! But of cause the media has been awash with stories about his alleged corruption. The Diezani⁸² case is also there. It is purely a media thing too. The media has made her the symbol of corruption. Yes, you are right about the National Assembly, they have carried out certain probes but even these are in response to the media. When the media spotlights it, they pick it up.

As we have already seen in the preceding chapter, this view is supported by several journalists, indicating a monitorial role by the press on the corruption-investigating agencies, on which, as our quantitative findings above show, the press depends on for much of its corruption stories. Finally, by giving corruption stories front page prominence and with such regularity as demonstrated by the quantitative data presented here, newspapers are performing watchdog role. Indeed, all three types of corruption stories (scandals, follow-ups and corruption talk) variously highlight corruption as a major issue in Nigerian politics and society. Indeed, Entman (2012: 187-188) argues that impactful scandals are those repeatedly reported and framed by the press, and as such forms part of the watchdog role of the press, even if, as Nigerian case examined here, they are sourced mostly through information subsidy (Mellado, 2015; Coronel, 2010). In other words, information subsidy is not necessarily a determinant factor in news production as often assumed and may not altogether rule out watchdog journalism. In this sense, our research reinforces existing findings (Lanosga and Martin, 2016; Eriksson and Östman, 2013; Reich, 2006; Örebro, 2002, etc) that

⁸¹ Immediate past President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015).

⁸² Former Minister of Petroleum, Mrs Alison Diezani (2011-2015) who had several alleges of corruption against, mostly by the online newspapers, some of which were then further investigated by the national assembly.

calls for nuance in understanding relationships between journalists and sources with regards to democratic media performance.

In addition, this research contributes to existing studies of scandal reporting, and to the understanding of the linkages between corruption, political culture, democracy and the press. As we have seen, corruption scandals are explained either as 'crisis of democracy' or through media-centric frameworks like competition, sensationalism and changing structures of media and technology (Tumber and Waisbord, 2004a; 2004b; Chalabi, 2004; Esser and Hartung, 2004; Tumber, 1993; Waisbord, 2004, etc.). However, our findings here suggest that aspects of political culture, that is, the historically entrenched tendency for Nigerian governments to make the 'fight against corruption' a focal point of their governance policy, either out of genuine concern for corruption or for political convenience, also contributes to generating corruption scandals in the newspapers. This occurs first in the establishment of numerous anti-corruption agencies and panels, which itself follows a historical trend, and then by the high-profile investigations and reports of these agencies which feeds news of corruption in the press. Thus, our findings support those of previous studies who locate the rise of scandals conflict among various actors within the political system rather than the media (Marchetti, 2009; Adut, 2008; 2004; Waisbord, 1996). Similarly, findings here have implications for the growing literature that finds correlation between democratic development, or aspects of it like press freedom, private media ownership and freedom of information legislation on the one hand, and exposure or reduction of corruption on the other (Kolstad and Wilg, 2016; Stanig, 2015; Camaj, 2013; Pellegata, 2012; Nam, 2012; Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Djankov et al, 2003). For example, Pellegata (2012) finds that elections and inter-party competition correlates strongly with lower levels of corruption. Stanig (2015) suggests that Mexican states with weaker defamation

laws tend to have higher coverage of corruption than those where defamation laws are more stringent against the press. Camaj (2013) finds that press freedom correlates strongly but indirectly with corruption, and its influence on corruption reduction is strongest where horizontal accountability is also strong. Most of these studies are concerned with connections between or conditions for horizontal (government to government) and vertical (citizens, civil society, media to government) forms of accountability. Thus, this presume some connections between exposure of corruption and its reduction in a given country, much the same assumption that underlies liberal watchdog theory. While our research here says nothing about corruption reduction, it does indicate that democratization and the relative freedom Nigerian media enjoys tends correlate with *exposure* of corruption. As our study period moves further away from the founding election of 1999, average annual coverage of corruption increases steadily in the newspapers, from slightly above 3% in 2001 to over 8.10% in 2012, as indicated by the trend line in Figure 4.2 above⁸³.

Moreover, election years and high rates of turn-over of officials also tend to generate more news of corruption as new successors embark on investigations of the government and tenures of their predecessors, and thus explaining the rise and fall of coverage over time. In this sense, the present research provides more illustrative evidence for such studies Camaj (2013) and others above. However, unlike studies using quantifiable data like press freedom indexes, and rankings of democracy and corruption compiled by Freedom House, Economist Intelligence Unit, Transparency International and so on, this research suggests more nuanced influences like political culture. As Dincer and Johnstone (2014) suggest, political culture also encourages disclosures of corruption in the media,

⁸³ See Chapter 4.

if not its incidence or reduction. Finally, the research contributes to the immediate literature on investigative journalism and press coverage of corruption in Nigeria where existing research tends to highlight, perhaps too much, ethnic politics in the coverage of corruption. Findings here show that three newspapers from the south report corruption cases involving southerners as much as they do when the cases involve northerners also. At the most, ethnic considerations may be more evident in close critical scrutiny of individual or a handful of scandals than more quantitative long-term trends adopted here.

8.4 Limitations of the study and future research:

In retrospect, there are several things I could have done differently when designing and collecting data for this study. For one, a survey of journalists on various questions about investigative reporting, might have proved more useful than newsroom observation. Conversely, I could have spent more time on the observation, perhaps say 6 months or longer, rather than 8 weeks, investigative reporting is generally sporadic and conducted mostly in the field. Secondly, most of the findings here cannot adequately generalize across all Nigerian media, particularly online media. Broadcast media in Nigeria eschew a different professional value (development journalism) and are mostly owned and controlled by the government. Thus, assumptions about and practice of investigative journalism, and even coverage of corruption generally could well be different. More significantly, online media like *Sahara Reporters* and *Premium Times* tend to do a lot of investigative reporting, including investigations of grand corruption involving even the most powerful Nigerian officials. But these media are relatively new and generally do not archive or index news they published in ways that researchers can use, complicating my objective of a trend analysis. Also, interviews with politicians, especially those once in the centre of corruption scandals could have offered data not obtainable

by content analysis or interviews with journalists and officials of anti-corruption agencies. However, these are all issues to consider for future research, which I discuss below.

The present research points to several new directions for further research, for example those of surveys of Nigerian journalism culture and role perceptions. Even most cross-country studies do not include Nigeria in their analysis and it will be interesting to see how Nigeria diverges from other African countries mostly included (Kenya, Uganda). Also, the rise of the internet and social media have made exposure of corruption in the media quite interesting. Sahara Reporters (New York) for example, is based on citizen journalism model and yet publishes investigative reports on corruption probably more than any media in Nigeria, and I'm not aware of any quantitative analysis of its investigations in the literature to date. A comparative analysis of online and print could highlight the potentials of the internet and new media to Nigeria's democratic media. Furthermore, questions of gender and investigative reporting, or political reporting more generally could be interesting to explore. I observed that in almost all the newspapers, political reporters are predominantly men, while at the same time the women female reporters tend to be in beats like education, health, fashion and entertainment. This raises an empirical question: is political reporting in Nigeria gendered? More significantly however, this research highlights the need to re-examine the idea of information subsidy in light of different types of news, news sources or reporting practices. For stories of corruption or investigative journalism, information subsidy might have different implications for fourth estate journalism than previously assumed.

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