

# Corruption Reporting in the Media in the 2015 Nigerian Elections: Setting the Agenda or Toeing the Line?

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## Executive summary

This joint study by the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) Research Consortium led by SOAS University of London and the Oak Centre for Journalism Development (OCJD) analysed media coverage of public-sector corruption and anti-corruption in Nigeria around the time of the 2015 elections. This is the first of a two-part series on corruption reportage around the election period in Nigeria. The forthcoming report will study the 2019 elections.

From a content analysis and audit of six newspapers published in Nigeria between 2014 and 2015, the study examined a total of 962 corruption and anti-corruption stories distributed online and/or in print. The news reports were selected for their regional representation across Nigeria's geo-political zones. The study sought to probe how the context of impending general elections affects reportage of corruption in the media throughout the general election cycle, including during candidate selection, party primaries, campaigns and the federal and state elections. An impact-mapping exercise measured possible consequences of anti-corruption/corruption media coverage on policy reforms, especially in the immediate period following changes in government.

The analysis revealed a rapid rise in media attention towards corruption issues in the months shortly before, during and after the 2015 general election. We conclude, therefore, that impending elections have an impact on media coverage of corruption and anti-corruption, with a special focus on key players of both ruling and opposition parties.

We also find that corruption reportage within this context clusters around certain variables, including the specific interests and ethos of the news organisations, and the types of corruption under focus, such as fraud, theft, the diversion or misappropriation of funds and bribery. For example, the analysis shows that news organisations like *Premium Times*, with its organisational focus on investigative journalism, often provided more robust coverage of high-profile corruption stories such as in its reporting of the Malabu Oil Bloc scandal.

We refrain from concluding that media focus on anti-corruption and corruption within the context of elections or a change in government necessarily affects policy-making with regard to anti-corruption, however. Instead, we found that the voyeuristic tendencies of the news outlets detracted from any pragmatic coverage of the developmental effects of corruption in Nigeria. A combination of hype and interested party agenda-setting has led to fatigue in terms of anti-corruption coverage and has taken away attention from key issues of accountability.

# 1. Corruption, elections and the media

## 1.1. Introduction

Designed to measure global perceptions of public-sector corruption, the recently published Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2018<sup>1</sup> gives some insight into Nigeria's struggle with its reputation as corrupt. Moving up four places since 2017, Nigeria is now placed 144 out of 180 in the latest CPI country rankings. However, this apparent improvement becomes moot when one examines Nigeria's actual CPI score, which has remained relatively constant over the past decade. While the CPI merely measures corruption perception – and hence runs the risk of subjective bias and is inherently incapable of measuring each country's accountability mechanisms – it nonetheless serves as a useful proxy for measuring corruption performance in individual countries.

Nigeria has maintained a CPI score of around 27% since 2012. As its score did not change between 2017 and 2018, the country's four-point improvement merely indicates that a few other countries performed worse than Nigeria in 2018. For comparison, fellow West African state Senegal moved up by nine points in the same period and currently has a 45% CPI score in the 2018 rankings.

As with the country's CPI score, Nigeria's reputation with regards to corruption has remained constant too. This is despite the fact that public-sector corruption and the need for requisite policy reforms have dominated public discourse since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. Indeed, three consecutive governments/administrations between 1999 and 2015 have made varying rhetorical and substantive (policy) claims of their commitment to fight corruption, the most popular being the prodigious use of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration to implement a controversial anti-corruption agenda between 2003 and 2007.

Yet what is corruption and how does the Nigerian system understand the concept? The Nigerian Constitution references corruption by highlighting the duty of the state to 'abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power'.<sup>2</sup> It does not define corrupt practices, however. Consequently, enforcers of the law draw on various legal provisions for prosecutorial processes, including the Criminal Code Act,<sup>3</sup> the Penal Code Act,<sup>4</sup> the EFCC Act<sup>5</sup> and the 2000

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<sup>1</sup> The CPI ranks 180 countries based on perceived levels of public-sector corruption. It uses a percentage scale, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is 'very clean'. For more information, see Transparency International (2019).

<sup>2</sup> The 1999 Constitution (As Amended), Chapter II, 15(5) (<http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nigeria-law.org/Criminal%20Code%20Act-Tables.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.lawnigeria.com/LFN/C/Criminal-Code-Act.php>

Act of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission<sup>6</sup> (ICPC). According to the latter, corruption ‘includes bribery, fraud and other related offences.’<sup>7</sup> In general, the ICPC Act references corruption with respect to public officials and the offer, facilitation or receipt of gratification, hence corrupt practices are defined in relation to public officials and public services.

Within these parameters, this study considers the intersection between corruption, the media and electoral processes. By focusing on media coverage of corruption and anti-corruption, we have interrogated how impending general elections give shape to the coverage of this social problem. We have questioned the value of politically motivated coverage and have sought to understand the impact of such coverage on public opinion and policy outcomes, particularly in the months immediately after elections.<sup>8</sup> Using consequence-mapping, we have analysed the corruption/anti-corruption media coverage against the anti-corruption agenda of incoming political actors set out in campaign promises or posturing and post-election policy-making.

## 1.2. Why should we care about corruption?

Nigerians continue to bear the political, economic and social effects of corruption. According to a 2016 PricewaterhouseCoopers report, using forgone losses of gross domestic product (GDP) since 1999, Nigeria can expect to lose as much as 37% of its GDP by 2030 if its corruption trajectory remains unchanged. This equates to losses of at least \$2,000 per person by 2030 amongst its estimated 180 million populations (ibid.).<sup>9</sup> According to the Global Corruption Barometer and Transparency International (2013, cited in PwC, 2016: 9), corruption induces a ‘self-perpetuating cycle of corruption and poverty’ that has a ‘long run negative impact on growth, primarily through reduction in human capital and investment’. In practical terms, the economic costs of corruption are measurable in relation to lost social services such as healthcare, education and access to basic public amenities. According to Transparency International (n.d.), corruption generates public distrust and apathy, which further creates nurturing space for corruption to expand, particularly in growing economies.

The Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) research consortium recognises not just the harmful effects of corruption on the economy but also the overwhelming ineffectiveness of formal anti-corruption measures, especially existing legal frameworks. Its research seeks pragmatic approaches and incremental strategies that engage organisations and specific sectors of the economy to proffer workable anti-corruption solutions (ACE, 2017). This joint ACE/Oak

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.nigeria-law.org/Economic%20And%20Financial%20Crimes%20Commission%20\(Establishment\)%20Act.htm](http://www.nigeria-law.org/Economic%20And%20Financial%20Crimes%20Commission%20(Establishment)%20Act.htm)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nigeria-law.org/Corrupt%20Practices%20and%20Other%20Related%20Offences%20Act%202000.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Preliminaries, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> The study is based on the assumption that impending elections invariably lend political relevance to news coverage. Corruption stories are, therefore, particularly interwoven with electoral processes.

<sup>9</sup> This figure is a simplistic estimation calculated by simulating the economic costs of corruption in the preceding years and using this to forecast expected losses, all things remaining constant.

Centre for Journalism Development (OCJD) study explores how the media helps set the public agenda on corruption and anti-corruption.

### 1.3. Methodology

The research asks: what are the observable changes in media coverage of corruption and anti-corruption as the general election cycle begins, and how does pre-election media coverage of corruption affect post-election policy-making? As a basic premise, we recognise that anti-corruption discourses gain more prominence during electoral cycles, and therefore the study sought to interrogate the changes in media coverage of corruption and anti-corruption through a representative media content analysis. The combined quantitative and qualitative approach tracked trends in reporting across selected media organisations within the context of Nigeria's 2015 elections – looking at the specific time frame of the general elections cycle, including candidate selection, party primaries, campaigns and the federal and state elections.

We conducted a temporal content analysis of six newspapers in Nigeria: *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times*, *Punch*, *Sahara Reporters*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard*.<sup>10</sup> A total of 962 corruption and anti-corruption stories were selected from the newspapers for their regional representation across Nigeria's geo-political zones. The period in focus spanned 12 calendar months between August 2014 and May 2015. In addition, to conduct a 'consequence map' of newspaper reportage of corruption on executive policy-making, we also conducted a content analysis of Executive Bills sent to the National Assembly between May 2015 and 2018, as well as related projects and programmes from federal ministries, departments and agencies.

Data collection and collation was carried out in three phases. In phase I corruption stories were manually extracted from print newspapers archived in three libraries in Abuja and Lagos. In phase II stories were extracted from online newspapers, including the websites and Twitter handles of both print and online news organisations. In phase III the team gathered information on all Executive Bills put forward to the National Assembly during the study period.

**Table 1: Newspaper samples**

Online newspapers	Print newspapers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Premium Times</li> <li>• Sahara Reporters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punch</li> <li>• Thisday</li> <li>• Daily Trust</li> <li>• Vanguard</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> This study focused on print and online newspapers primarily because they provide easier access to complete data sets within the time period selected. The newspapers for this study were selected based on geographical spread and readership.

For clustering and analysis we applied a loose categorisation of stories across ten main themes:

- Misappropriation
- Bribery
- Theft (conversion of government/public properties)
- Fraud
- Election tampering (inducing electoral officers to tamper with election outcomes/ballot snatching)
- Diversion of public funds to personal or other uses
- Money laundering
- Forgery (including falsification of public records or tendering falsified documents)
- Embezzlement
- Other

The study also analysed four particular high-profile corruption scandals between 2014 and 2015: the \$2 billion Dasuki scandal, the Diezani oil scandal, the Malabu oil field scandal and scandals involving prominent politicians.

Next, the study sought to extrapolate a correlation between the heightened media coverage of corruption prior to or during elections and executive decision-making in the post-elections period, holding all other factors constant.<sup>11</sup> While not making a causal argument, we aimed to interrogate how value-laden reportage can shape public opinion, thus influencing the direction of public policy-making.

The study's main findings are presented under three general categories. First, we examine points of divergence/convergence among the newspapers and their coverage of the cases under review. This analysis points to the ways in which newspaper coverage of each corruption case aligned or diverged, highlighting similarities in coverage, possible evidence of biases and political sympathies, and general propensity for anti-corruption content within a newspaper. Patterns emerging from each newspaper's story focus and general newsroom ethos also help to highlight a newspaper's organisational focus or interest in anti-corruption reportage.<sup>12</sup> By contextualising the coverage, we attempt to make projections of possible bias in individual reportage.

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<sup>11</sup> Without making a causal argument about heightened media coverage and impending elections, this study merely draws conclusions on the observable relationship between both factors. This also means, however, that other contexts – for instance, external factors such as global trends or incidental uncovering of huge corruption scandals that may not be politically motivated – are not necessarily incorporated into the analysis of this relationship.

<sup>12</sup> The study references individual newspaper coverage preference as an outshoot of its pre-defined focus and guiding principles. For instance, Premium Times' focus on investigative journalism and enterprise reporting is distinct from Thisday's broader outlook and coverage.

The second category is clustering. Here, we present general patterns and themes in the corruption cases under review, underscoring the types of corruption and anti-corruption stories that made the headlines. Through this, we examine how impending elections provide a framework within which aspirants, candidates and their associations are scrutinised by the media and the public. We also point to the kinds of corruption content that become more salient as elections draw closer.

Third, and finally, we examine trends in media coverage of corruption content during the electoral cycle with quantitative and qualitative thematic analysis of the coverage and types of stories published.

## 2. Corruption reportage and Nigeria's 2015 elections

### 2.1. Corruption coverage by the Nigerian media

Historically, the media operates as a fourth estate', working on the same level as other governing structures to ensure accountability and adherence to democratic ideals. This is the backdrop to the constitutional role of the Nigerian media. According to the Nigerian Constitution 'the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people'.<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding this mandate, however, historical engagement by Nigeria's media with the executive and legislative arms of government has been inconsistent and has at times undermined the powers conferred on it by the Constitution.

The reportage of corruption- and anti-corruption-related cases by the news media in the leadup to the 2015 general elections showed a largely unsophisticated approach by the news organisations under review. For instance, most coverage took on a news approach, with stories and their follow-ups often lacking a running thread to link an emerging issue. The overall coverage of each corruption case by the individual newspapers showed little or no strategic structure. The media outlets made minimal attempts to give depth to the coverage or to situate individual stories within the wider context of supporting democratic institutions, as is mandated by the Constitution. Consequently, we observe that corruption cases were handled by the Nigerian news media with a largely voyeuristic approach typical of tabloid journalism, in which stories and headlines were selected in a simplistic manner for their sensational value and their ability to grab attention. Such an approach erodes the capacity of the media to provide the necessary guidance and framework within which the electorate can make informed choices, especially with regard to voting decisions.

### 2.2. Elections: setting the media agenda

In ordinary contexts, corruption stories are often covered as news items as the subject comes to light, through, for example, legal indictments or enterprise or investigative reporting. For instance, coverage of a series of stories on tax evasion and suspicious offshore banking accounts of public officials – the so-called Panama Papers – by *Premium Times* in 2016 was the result of an international investigative reporting project, based on a trove of

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<sup>13</sup> Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as Amended in 2011), Section 22. This provision is similar to the mandate of the Constitution of Ghana but distinct from the provisions of the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution, which merely ensures freedom of expression and freedom of the press. See: Bill of Rights, Constitution of South Africa, Section 16 (<http://paralegaladvice.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/01-PLM2015-Constitution.pdf>) and Constitution of Ghana, Chapter 12 (5) (<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/republic/constitution.php?id=Gconst12.html>).

banking documents leaked by an anonymous source.<sup>14</sup> *Premium Times* was able to publish the news reports as it was the Nigerian newspaper chosen by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists to take part in the investigation.

During the election cycle, however, corruption coverage is heightened, often as a direct result of campaign talking points. Electoral campaigns often highlight existing socio-economic problems which the candidates or parties intend to tackle if elected into office. In Nigeria, this often revolves around economic and infrastructural inadequacies, with each party/candidate promising to do better than the incumbent. In cases where an incumbent is seeking re-election, the strategy often involves highlighting the economic achievements of the current government.

In general, corruption has been a prominent feature in electoral campaigning in Nigeria. In the 2011 elections the six main focus areas of individual party campaigns included: security, corruption, the economy, health, education and infrastructure (National Democratic Institute, 2011). In the 2015 elections the opposition party, the All People's Congress (APC), focused on corruption in its core campaign messaging. Analysis of the 2015 general election campaign messages shows that corruption received the greatest attention in APC's campaign commercials, with a 13.63% average focus on corruption in every commercial.<sup>15</sup>

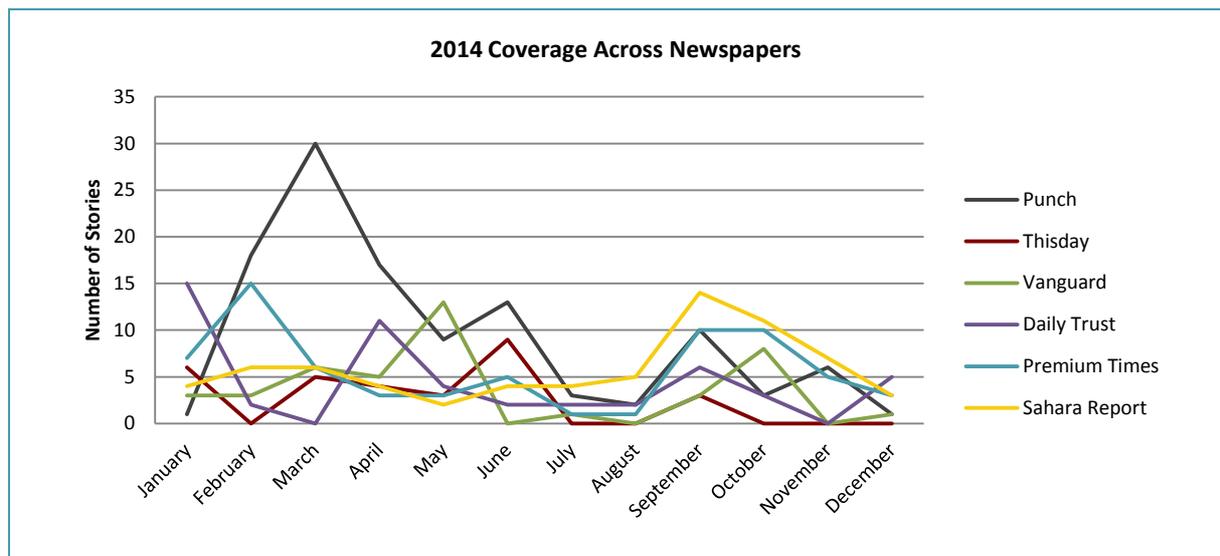
During the election cycle, therefore, it is unsurprising to see a central theme of the political campaigns – corruption – being used as a critical lens through which the news media scrutinise candidates and their associations. Accusations of corruption are also used by competing parties to discredit one another. Such accusations contribute to the news cycle, with the media latching on to campaign speeches and candidates' statements to boost content, which subsequently enhances media focus on corruption. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate corruption coverage by the six newspapers under review during the electoral cycle. Candidate selection occurred in October 2014.<sup>16</sup>

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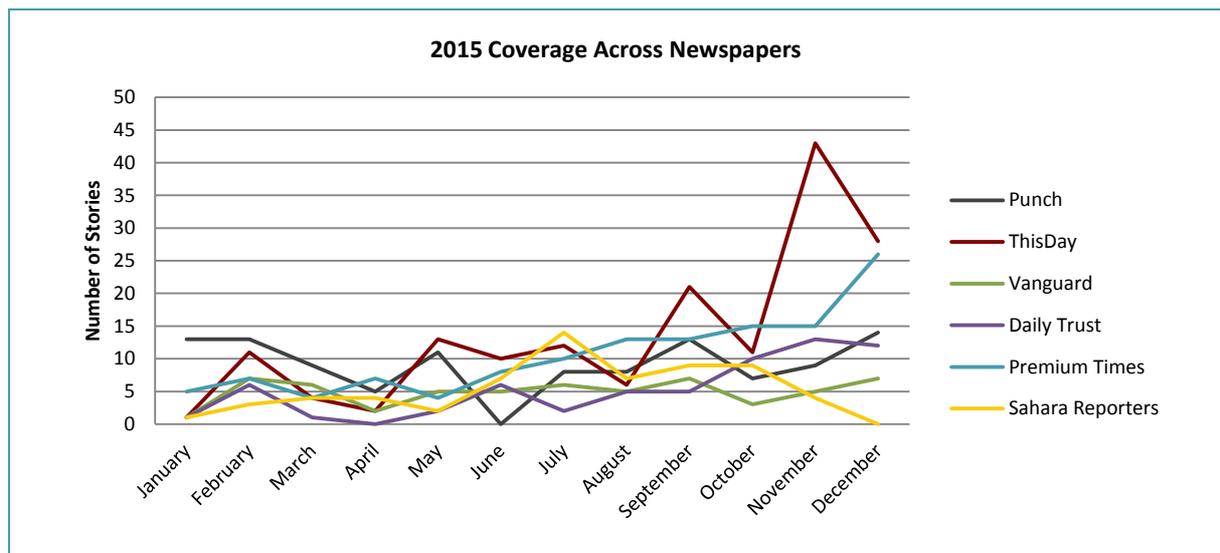
<sup>14</sup> *Premium Times* was the Nigerian newspaper selected by the consortium of international news organisations for the series, which would eventually be named the 'Panama Papers'. For more, see Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (2018).

<sup>15</sup> Also within the top three were the economy (11.36%) and social welfare (9.09%). For more information, see: Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals in Nigeria (2018).

<sup>16</sup> In 2015 candidate selection within individual parties occurred in October, 2014. This aligns with the relative spike in corruption coverage. See Figure 3 for the electoral timeline.

**Figure 1: Corruption coverage in 2014**

Source: OCJD (2018)

**Figure 2: Corruption coverage in 2015**

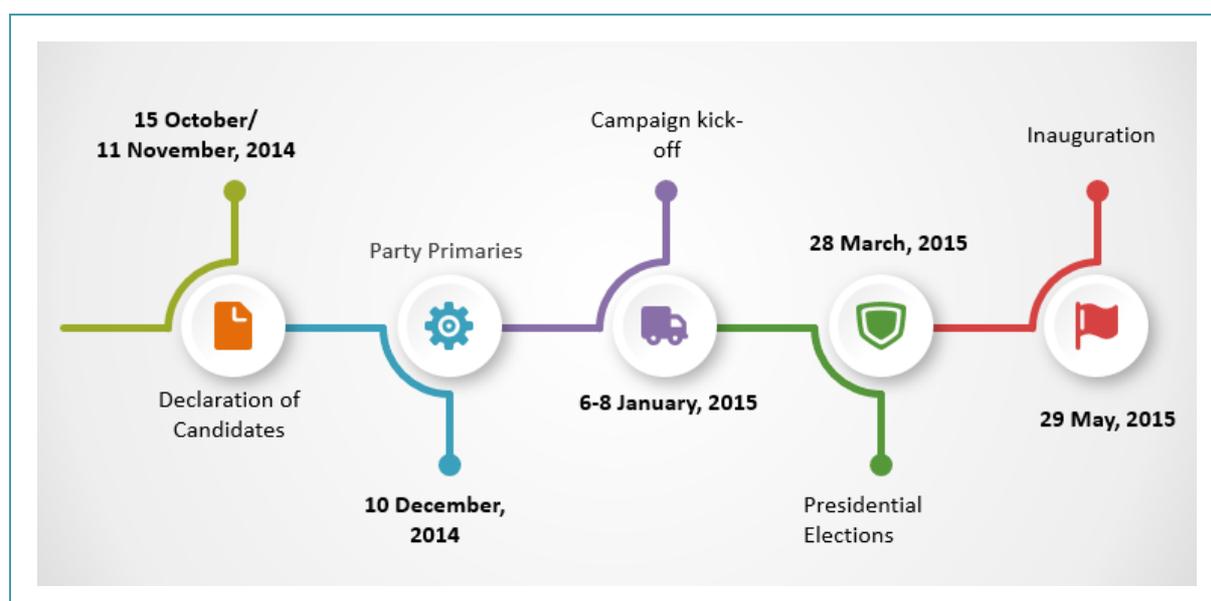
Source: OCJD (2018)

### 2.3. Opposition versus ruling-party contestation

The 2015 general elections – particularly the presidential elections – provide an important context within which to study Nigeria’s electoral processes. For the first time since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999, the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) faced a true and credible opposition party in the APC which was capable of challenging its 15-year domination. In the face of stiff competition, the PDP likely handled the campaign process with more seriousness than in previous years, where the main opposition parties merely wielded regional hegemony and could not compete with the PDP’s national domination.

Given this, the 2015 contest between the APC and the PDP –which resulted in the first change in power since 1999 –provides a credible framework to study competitive electioneering and is the reason for our focus on the two main political parties. Scrutiny of media reportage of corruption during the 2015 election cycle provides insight on the media’s role in shaping public discourse and opinion in Nigeria’s most important general elections to date.

**Figure 3: Nigeria’s 2015 election cycle**



Source: OCJD (2018)

## 2.4. High-profile case studies

As described previously, this study identified at least 10 categories of corruption stories, based on pre-determined selection criteria. In addition to this thematic analysis, the study also delved into particularly popular stories that were widely covered by the six news organisations under review. Four cases were selected as ‘spectacle cases’ which are discussed in turn below. These particular cases highlight the Nigerian media’s penchant for voyeuristic coverage, which does not necessarily help the general public to understand the institutional or developmental implications of corruption involving public officials. A comparative analysis shows the coverage of each story by the six selected news organisations.

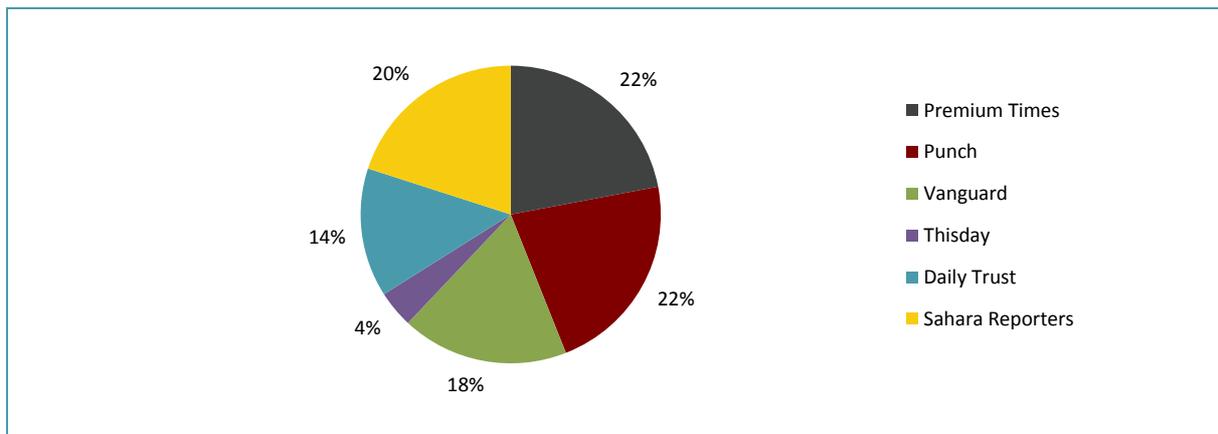
### 2.4.1. Case I: The \$2 billion Dasuki scandal

In September 2014, the South African authorities seized a private Nigerian aircraft carrying \$9.3 million in cash. The scandal, which began with the seizure of a plane registered to a popular televangelist and head of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Ayo Oritsejeafor, soon escalated into what came to be known as the ‘Dasuki scandal’. The scandal swept through the highest echelons of Nigeria’s secret service institutions and subsequently the former director of the National Security Agency (NSA) was accused of

flouting procurement laws and rewarding spurious security contracts to the tune of \$2 billion. Mr Sambo Dasuki is currently standing trial for money laundering.

The scandal played out as the election cycle began, drawing in the main political actors. The APC accused then President Goodluck Jonathan of involvement in the diversification of security funds and of using his close allies for the scheme. The reaction from the Nigerian media varied slightly; while most latched on to the scandal and churned out multiple stories, others were less enthusiastic. *Premium Times* and *Punch* published the highest number of reports between September and December 2014 (see Figure 4).

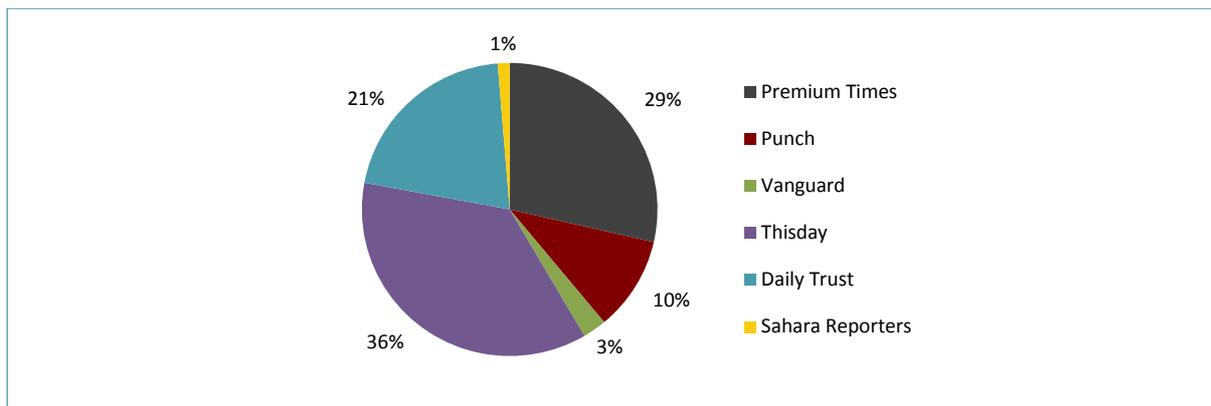
**Figure 4: 2014 media coverage of the Dasuki scandal**



Source: OCJD calculations, 2018

While coverage throughout 2014 focused on the weight of the scandal and the news value of the issue, in 2015 the coverage was mostly published in the post-election period as President Buhari sought to move beyond his anti-corruption rhetoric. Dasuki was formally charged to court in October 2015. The responses of the respective news organisations were clear in this second phase –as depicted in Figure 5, *Thisday* was most aggressive in its coverage, leading with 28 stories. It must be noted, however, that this news outlet had vested interests, since the publisher of the newspaper was named in the preliminary investigations as one of the recipients of the Dasuki largesse.<sup>17</sup> This, perhaps, explains the near-zero coverage of the scandal by *Thisday* when the scandal first broke in 2014, as well as the prodigious 2015 coverage which consisted mostly of news stories and critical coverage of the government’s prosecutorial process.

<sup>17</sup> Following the indictment, *Thisday* publisher Nduka Obaigbena returned \$350million, part of the Dasuki largesse, to the EFCC. For more, see: <https://punchng.com/2-1bn-scandal-thisday-publisher-obaigbena-returns-n350m/>

**Figure 5: 2015 media coverage of the Dasuki scandal**

Source: OCJD calculations, 2018

Perhaps owing to the sheer enormity of the monetary figures involved, the Dasuki scandal is a cogent example of the tabloidization of corruption stories in the Nigerian news media. *Thisday's* 2015 coverage of the scandal rode on the popularity of the issue. Yet, while the case provided much information on the persons involved in the alleged bribe-taking, the newspaper's coverage of the scandal was, at best, a mere regurgitation of court proceedings or simple news stories of indictments, often announced by attention-grabbing headlines that sensationalised courtroom proceedings. For instance, on 15 December 2015, a Dasuki-themed front-page story, 'FG arraigns Dasuki, Dokpesi gets bail,' – the third news story that month – was hardly more than a reproduction of the court charges against the principal actors in the case. An accompanying news story, 'PDP overwhelmed by corruption revelations, Says APC...', further politicised the lead story.<sup>18</sup>

#### 2.4.2. Case II: The Diezani oil scandal

The data show a spike in corruption coverage between January and March of 2014 (see Figure 1). Even though this did not occur strictly within the timeframe of the election cycle (between October 2014 and May 2015), a particular corruption case bears mentioning, because of the huge impact of the case and its spill over effect, which set the tone for APC's anti-corruption narrative in the electioneering months that followed.

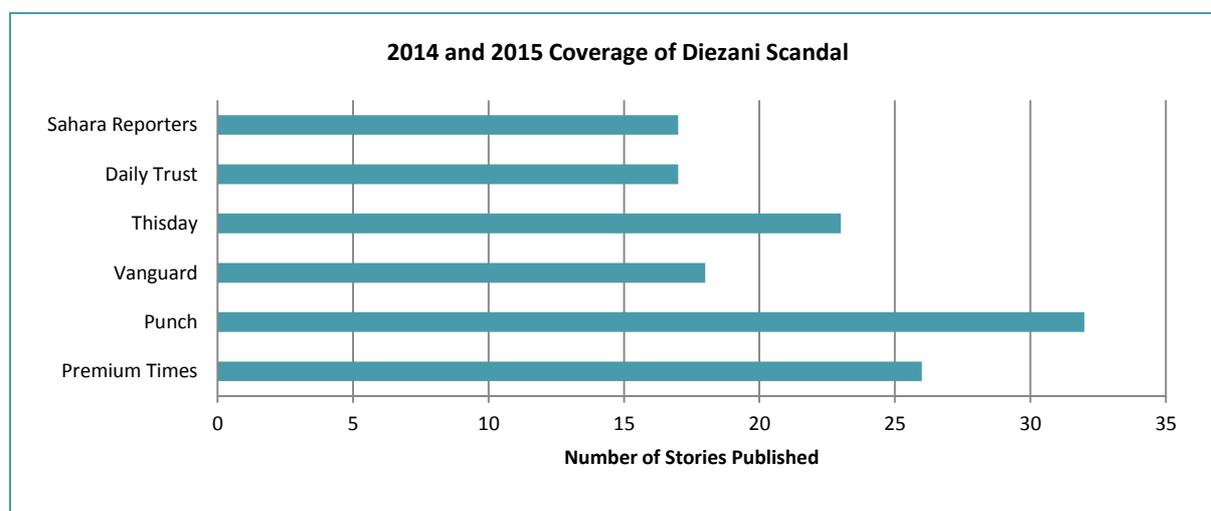
The Diezani oil scandal is interwoven with the alarm raised by the former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) over the illegal non-remittance of \$20 billion in oil revenue by the Nigerian National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC). It was argued that the NNPC and its related subsidiaries could get away with this, since its accounting practices did not allow it to track outflows or inflows of money. The case against the NNPC began in late 2013, but in February 2014 it morphed into a scandal centred on the then minister of petroleum resources, Diezani Alison-Madueke. With political campaigns in full swing later in the year, the APC further politicised the scandal by accusing the PDP-led government of suppressing investigations. *Premium Times* (2014a) headlined the accusation by the APC on 27 December

<sup>18</sup> For 15 December 2015 front page see: <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/thisday/20151215> (accessed 16/04/2019).

in its report ‘Nigerian govt suppressing audit report on missing \$20 billion oil money –APC’. Prior to this critique by the APC, the Lagos-based newspaper, *Punch*, published two strongly-worded editorials, calling for the oil minister’s prosecution, titled ‘Mr President, Alison Madueke’s cup is full’ and ‘NNPC changes: Diezani owes Nigerians explanation’ in April and August, respectively (*Punch*, 2014a, b).

It is noteworthy that, across the board, newspapers reported extensively on this scandal from when the story first broke in 2013 through the election cycle in 2014 and 2015. While some coverage took a neutral approach, as in the *Vanguard*, others such as *Punch* were deeply critical.

**Figure 6: Cross-section of newspaper coverage of the Diezani scandal**



Source: OCJD calculations, 2018

### 2.4.3. CASE III: The Malabu oil field scandal

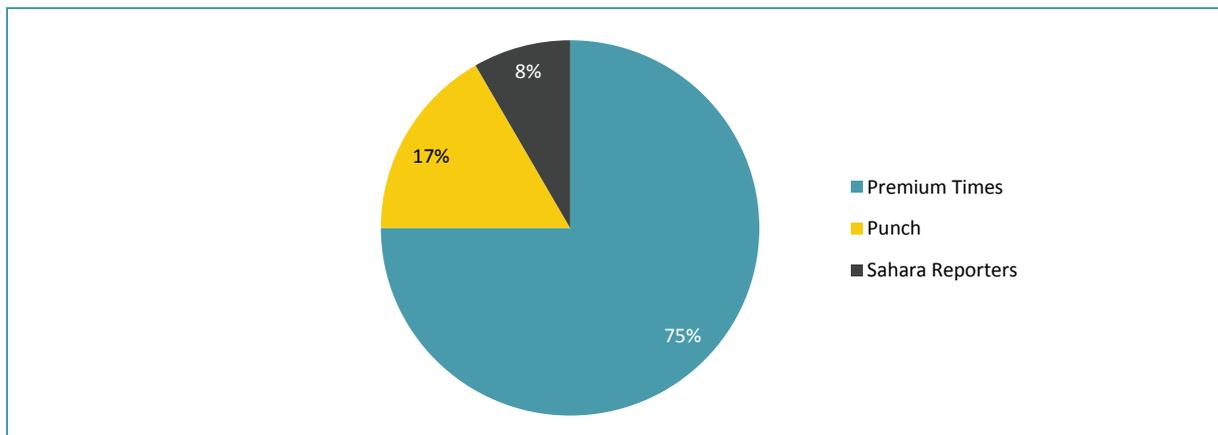
The \$1.1 billion Malabu bribery scandal involved multinational oil companies Shell and Eni over the award of one of Nigeria’s richest oil fields, OPL 245 in 1998, during the military leadership of the late head of state, Sani Abacha. The Malabu scandal has endured several decades and revolves around these multinational companies, top-level government officials and politicians as well as their associates, who played different roles in securing the oil field. At the centre of it all is Dan Etete, former oil minister during the Abacha era (*Premium Times*, 2014b).

The Malabu scandal remains relevant even today, as international prosecutors continue to secure indictments against political actors in Nigeria, some of who remain powerful players in contemporary politics. The elections provided an entry point for the opposition to use the scandal to score a point against the ruling PDP. On 12 October 2014, the APC alleged that the Jonathan government was involved in the Malabu scandal and that a cover-up was under way. Although this accusation was largely anecdotal, *Premium Times* published the APC press release under the headline ‘Malabu \$1.1 billion fraud: APC asks Jonathan to come clean’, without offering any back story on how the Jonathan administration was involved in the scandal (*Premium Times*, 2014c). A subsequent December 2015 story, however, detailed

a \$523 million bribery allegation against President Jonathan in relation to the scandal (*Premium Times*, 2015).

While *Premium Times*, with nine stories, took the lead in pushing out the Malabu story between 2014 and 2015, the *Daily Trust*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* published nothing of the scandal. *Sahara Reporters* published only one report in the period under review and *Punch* published just two. This, perhaps, highlights the interests of individual newspapers in specific types of stories and the effect it has on corruption coverage. The Malabu scandal emerged as a result of investigative/enterprise coverage by *Premium Times* reporters and the story was sustained by the same newspaper and journalists over time.

**Figure 7: 2014 and 2015 coverage of the Malabu scandal**



Source: OCJD calculations, 2018

#### 2.4.4. CASE IV: Scandals involving prominent politicians

In general, the highest percentage of corruption and anti-corruption stories published between 2014 and 2015 focused on prominent politicians.<sup>19</sup> In total, 33.2% of the corruption reportage during the review period focused on the main election contenders and their allies or political affiliates. Corruption charges against prominent politicians are commonplace. However, in the months leading up to elections, such cases became even more pronounced. The data shows frequent coverage of corruption stories involving former PDP cabinet members such as former aviation ministers Femi Fani-Kayode and Stella Oduah. In the post-election period, the Senate president, Bukola Saraki, faced widely reported corruption charges, mostly thought to be politically motivated following his fallout with his party, the APC.

Media coverage of scandalous behaviour by prominent politicians or public officials escalated during the election cycle, particularly in the weeks following the party primaries and candidate nominations. News organisations pursued these stories, often with sensational headlines, and situated them within political frames so that the actions of individual public officials were projected onto their political party, often with no evidence. In

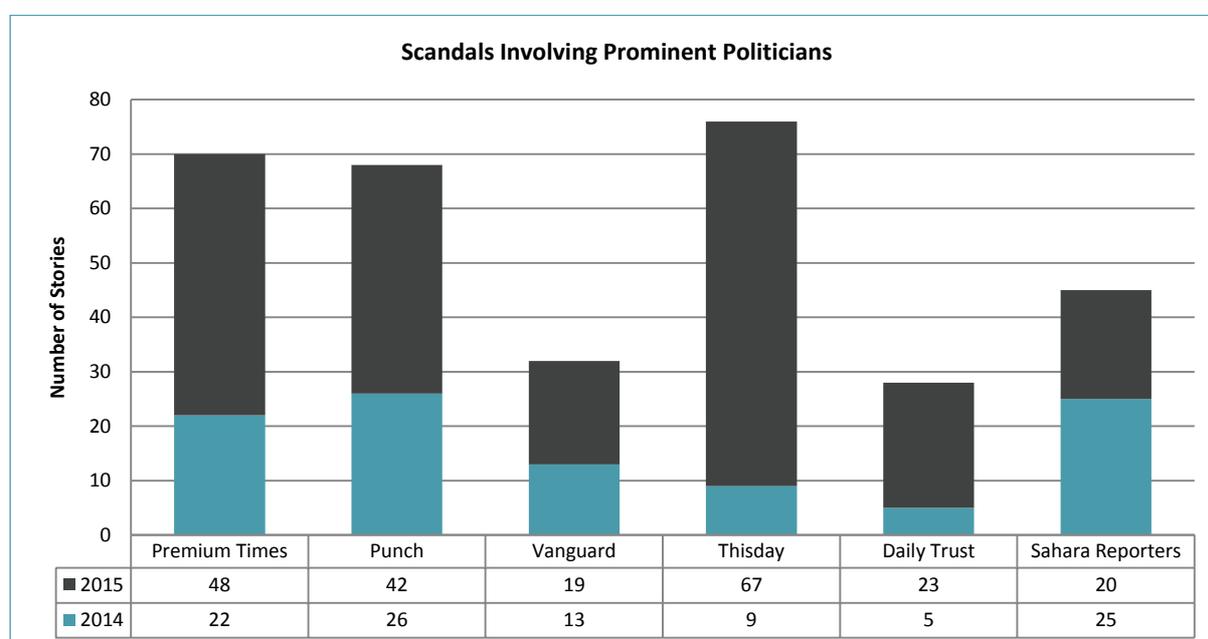
<sup>19</sup> This excludes stories regarding politicians who were involved in the nine other corruption categories used in this study.

many instances, headlines merely reproduced verbatim insults that were being traded between the two main political parties. This change in coverage is evident in *Punch*: between January and November 2014, stories involving public officials were mostly news stories, covering existing cases and legal processes; between January and March 2015, however, 9 out of 15 stories published by *Punch* about public-office corruption were direct quotes of accusations, counter-accusations and insults by political parties and their surrogates. In the pre-election period, corrupt ministers were often linked to the ruling PDP party and the APC used these individuals as examples of the failures and corrupt tendencies of the PDP in their anti-corruption campaign rhetoric.

News organisations provided unfiltered coverage of these stories, again without scrutinising the wider developmental implications of each scandal. For instance, most coverage did not examine individual corruption stories in relation to forgone developmental or infrastructural projects. Both Fani-Kayode and Oduah headed Nigeria's ailing aviation sector, yet most media coverage of the corruption charges against them barely situated these cases within the context of the poorly performing aviation sector.

With the entry of the APC-led government in 2015, media coverage of corruption-related stories increased in all but one of the newspapers under review (*Sahara Reporters*). The most significant increment was observed for *Thisday*, where coverage increased from 9 stories in 2014 to 67 in 2015. It is noteworthy; however, that most of the 2015 coverage consisted of news stories on EFCC indictments or prosecution of accused politicians, which reflect flurry of EFCC cases and indictments in the early days of Buhari's government.

**Figure 8: 2014 and 2015 coverage of corruption stories involving prominent politicians**



Source: OCJD data, 2018

## 2.5. Trends in reporting

The general patterns in corruption and anti-corruption coverage by the Nigerian media between 2014 and 2015 show different degrees of divergence and clustering. In this section, we discuss the trends under three main categories: points of divergence/convergence; clustering; and general reportage trends. The second category, clustering, presents patterns in the corruption cases under review, underscoring the types of corruption and anti-corruption stories that made the headlines. The category points to the kinds of corruption content that tend to become more cogent as elections draw closer or in the immediate period after elections/inauguration of newly elected officials. The final category, general reportage trends, discusses quantitative and qualitative thematic analysis of the media coverage, the types of stories and other general findings in the study.

### 2.5.1. Points of divergence/convergence:

Here, we identify similarities and differences in coverage of the cases under review and categorise the newspapers based on observed biases or possible political sympathies, as well as a general propensity or preference for anti-corruption reportage.

#### Political alliances:

We found differences in the coverage of corruption or anti-corruption news stories according to possible lines of political affiliation. News organisations noted to have strong affiliations with the leading political parties were sparing or sympathetic in their coverage of certain corruption stories.

This study refrained from covering newspapers owned by politicians, but it should be recognised that such a category of publication exists (often referred to as politician businessperson-owned (PBO) newspapers),<sup>20</sup> which may be said to be subject to the general Nigerian business environment with its prevalence of public- and private-sector corruption and impunity. Consequently, one can make projections of bias when popular corruption stories are reported minimally or not at all by certain newspapers, perhaps pointing to the existence of gatekeepers within media organisations ranging from media owners to senior editors, who filter content to protect certain political figures. For instance, as previously mentioned, the \$1.9 billion Sambo Dasuki trial in 2015 involved the publisher of *Thisday*, Nduka Obaigbena, who was indicted as a recipient of the largesse. After almost completely ignoring the story when it first broke in 2014, we observed that *Thisday* provided prodigious coverage of the corruption scandal against the former head of the NSA in 2015, when he was charged to court. But, unlike other newspapers that took a critical stance, *Thisday* provided bland and mostly sympathetic coverage of the scandal, especially in its 2015 coverage. For example, on 23 July 2015, *Thisday* published an op-ed titled 'Dasuki:

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<sup>20</sup> PBOs are news organisations established as private businesses by politicians. In Nigeria, prominent newspapers such as *The Nation*, *Daily Sun* and *Independent* are owned by politicians, who are often able to limit the editorial freedom of the newspaper. For more, see Ojebode (2013) and Mordi and Ogbu (2017).

encounter with a spymaster', in which the author extolled the admirable qualities of the NSA head, soon to be officially charged to court on a N13 billion count of money laundering.

### **The organisational preferences and ethos of newspapers**

Certain news organisations take a clear anti-corruption stance, while others take a more neutral stance and generally focus on news stories alone. *Premium Times* and *Sahara Reporters*, two internet-based news organisations, tend to do more investigative/enterprise reporting such was the case with *Premium Times* taking the lead in reporting the Malabu scandal. Other newspapers, such as *Vanguard* and *Thisday*, tend towards news stories and analyses and rarely advance big investigations. Both newspapers provided zero coverage of the Malabu scandal during the period under review, for example.

### **Regional sympathies**

In general, southern-based newspapers, such as *Vanguard*, provided sympathetic coverage of the PDP and more critical coverage of the APC. This trend is the direct opposite of the northern-based *Daily Trust* newspaper.

We note that this trend is not uncommon in Nigeria, where news organisations have served regional interests historically. Indeed, the vibrant Nigerian press has its roots in activism, especially the anti-colonial movement, which was an era when regional political institutions set up newspapers as political tools. For example, the *National Tribune* was established in 1949 and was used to further the interests of the Action Group, a Western Region political party. The *New Nigerian* declared in 1966 'As a Northern newspaper, we shall seek to identify ourselves with the North and its peoples, their interests and aspirations'.<sup>21</sup> While such explicit editorial positions are not to be found in today's newspapers, regional loyalties are still observable in media outputs.

### **2.5.2. Clustering**

#### **Common focus/coverage**

From the content analysis we observed clustering of corruption coverage around the common themes listed in section 1.3 (see Table 2 also). In general, *Punch*, *Premium Times* and *Sahara Reporters* published the most coverage on corruption and anti-corruption between 2014 and 2015. In addition to the numerical frequency of the coverage, it is important to also consider the quality and depth of the coverage provided. Hence, whereas *Thisday* published the highest number of corruption stories in 2015, *Punch* and *Premium Times* published more in-depth analyses and provided greater contextual coverage of the issues than *Thisday* and *Vanguard*.

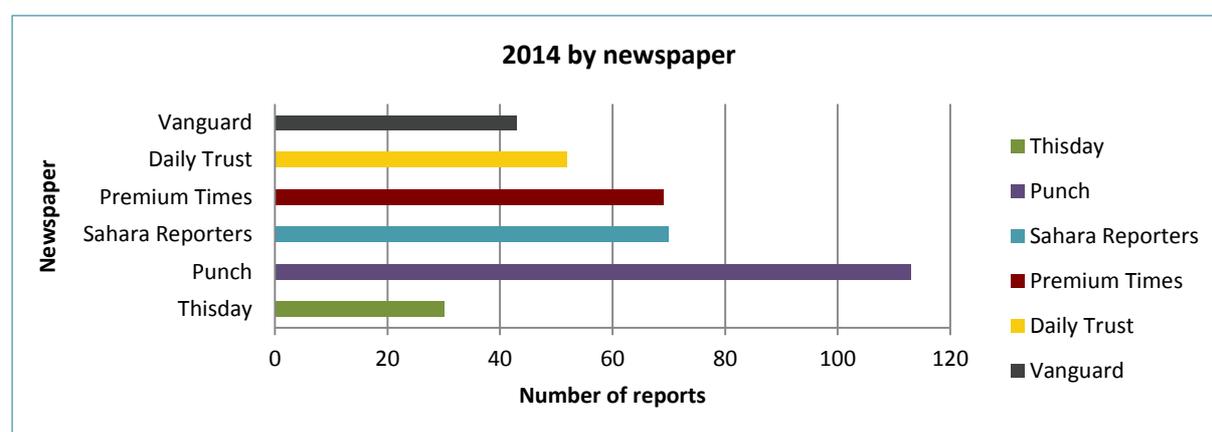
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<sup>21</sup> For more on the regional history of Nigerian newspapers, see Adesoji and Hahn (2011).

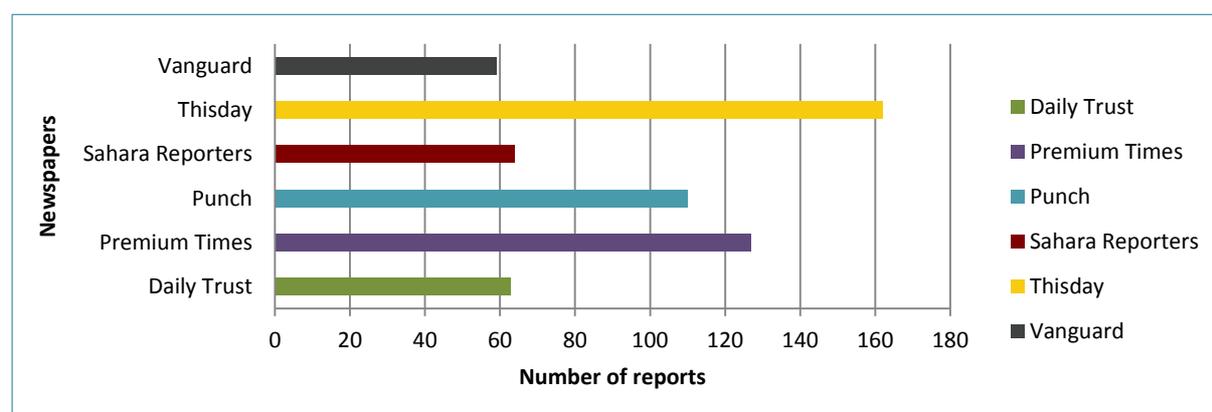
**Table 2: Thematic clustering of coverage**

Newspaper	Bribery 2014	Fraud 2014	Theft 2014	Misappropriation 2014	Diversion of funds 2014	Embezzlement 2014	Election tampering 2014	Forgery 2014	Money laundering 2014	Other	Total
Daily Trust	0	6	4	1	6	1	0	0	0	34	52
Premium Times	8	26	4	8	3	3	0	1	16	0	69
Punch	3	22	19	13	5	0	0	2	4	45	113
Sahara Reporters	4	27	6	2	4	2	0	0	12	13	70
Thisday	2	3	4	2	5	0	0	0	1	13	30
Vanguard	2	9	5	1	5	0	1	2	2	16	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>377</b>

Source: OCJD (2018)

**Figure 9: 2014 corruption coverage by newspaper**

Source: OCJD (2018)

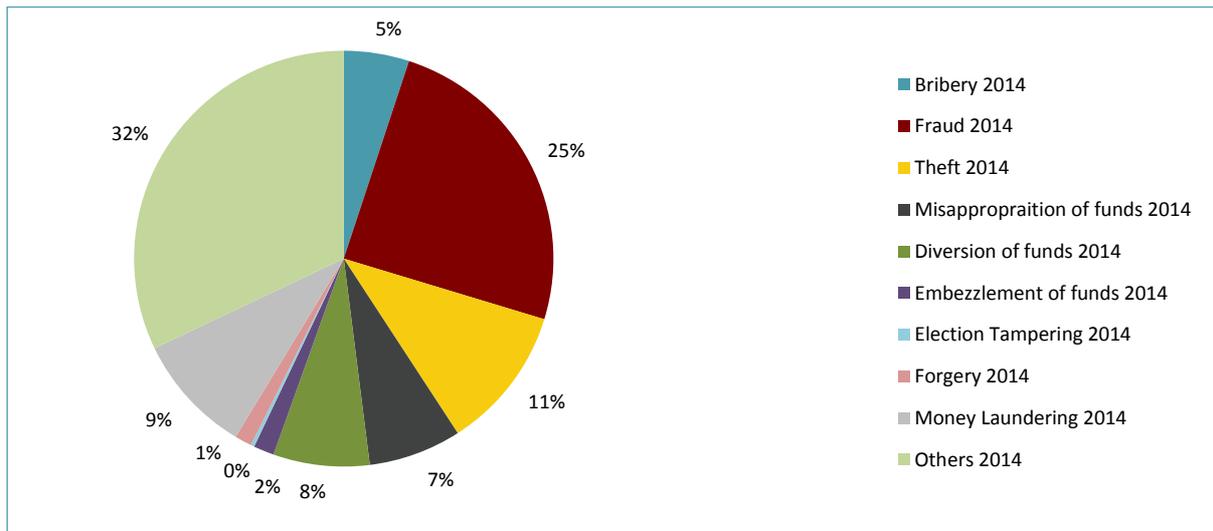
**Figure 10: 2014 corruption coverage by newspaper**

Source: OCJD (2018)

The corruption stories themselves had several points of convergence. For example, the most reported form of corruption was 'Fraud', with 93 stories published in 2014 and 122 in 2015.

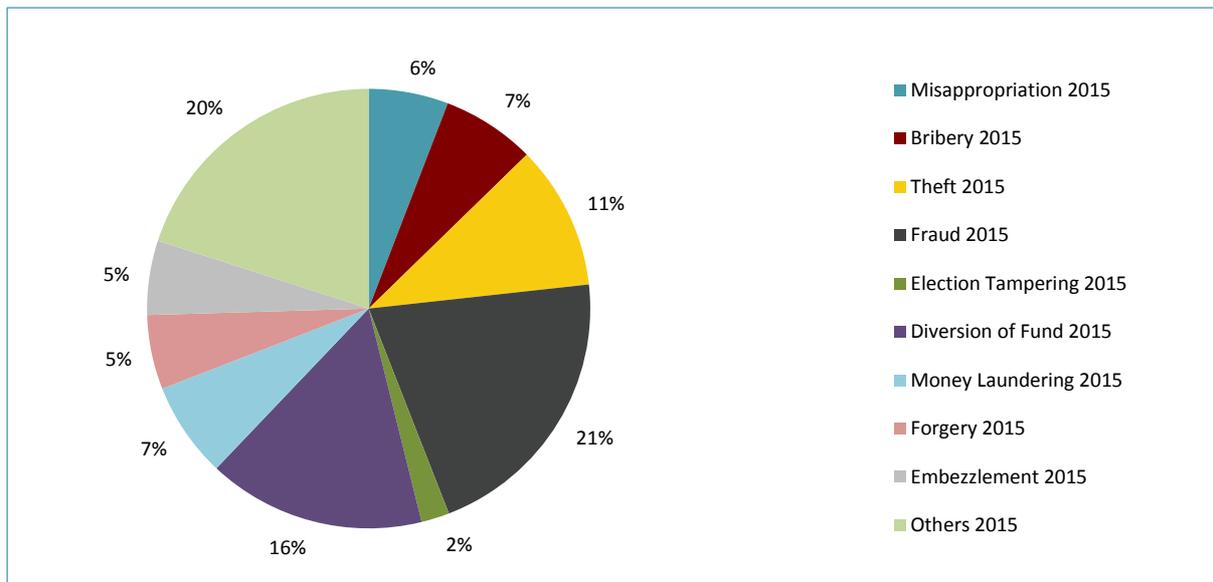
Theft, money laundering, diversion/misappropriation of funds and bribery were also among the top five most common forms of corruption covered in both 2014 and 2015 (Figures 11 and 12). However, we observed a change in coverage over time – Figure 13 illustrates how *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times* and *Punch* led the coverage of fraud-related corruption stories in 2014 but that coverage by *Punch* dropped off in 2015 and was overtaken by *Thisday*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*. Figure 15 shows a marked spike in the coverage of corruption stories related to diversion of funds by *Thisday* and *Sahara Reporters*.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 11: 2014 coverage by corruption category**



Source: OCJD (2018)

**Figure 12: 2015 coverage by corruption category**



Source: OCJD (2018)

<sup>22</sup> For *Thisday*, this spike is a reflection of their prodigious coverage of the Dasuki trial in 2015.

Figure 13: Fraud coverage in 2014 and 2015

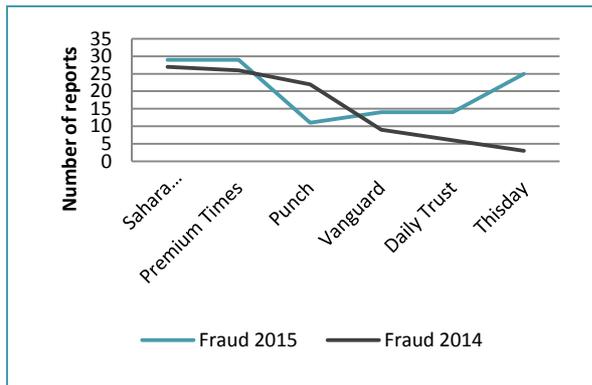


Figure 14: Theft coverage in 2014 and 2015

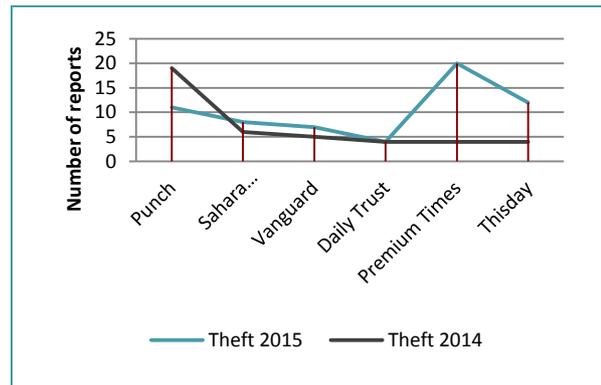


Figure 15: Diversion of funds coverage in 2014 and 2015

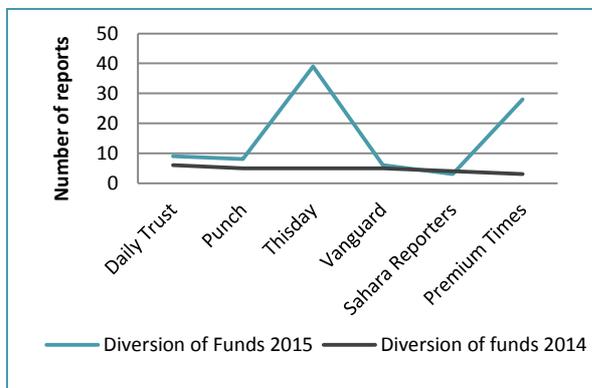
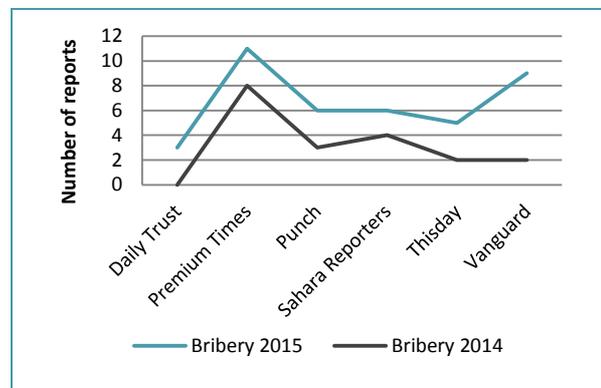


Figure 16: Bribery coverage in 2014 and 2015



Source: OCJD (2018)

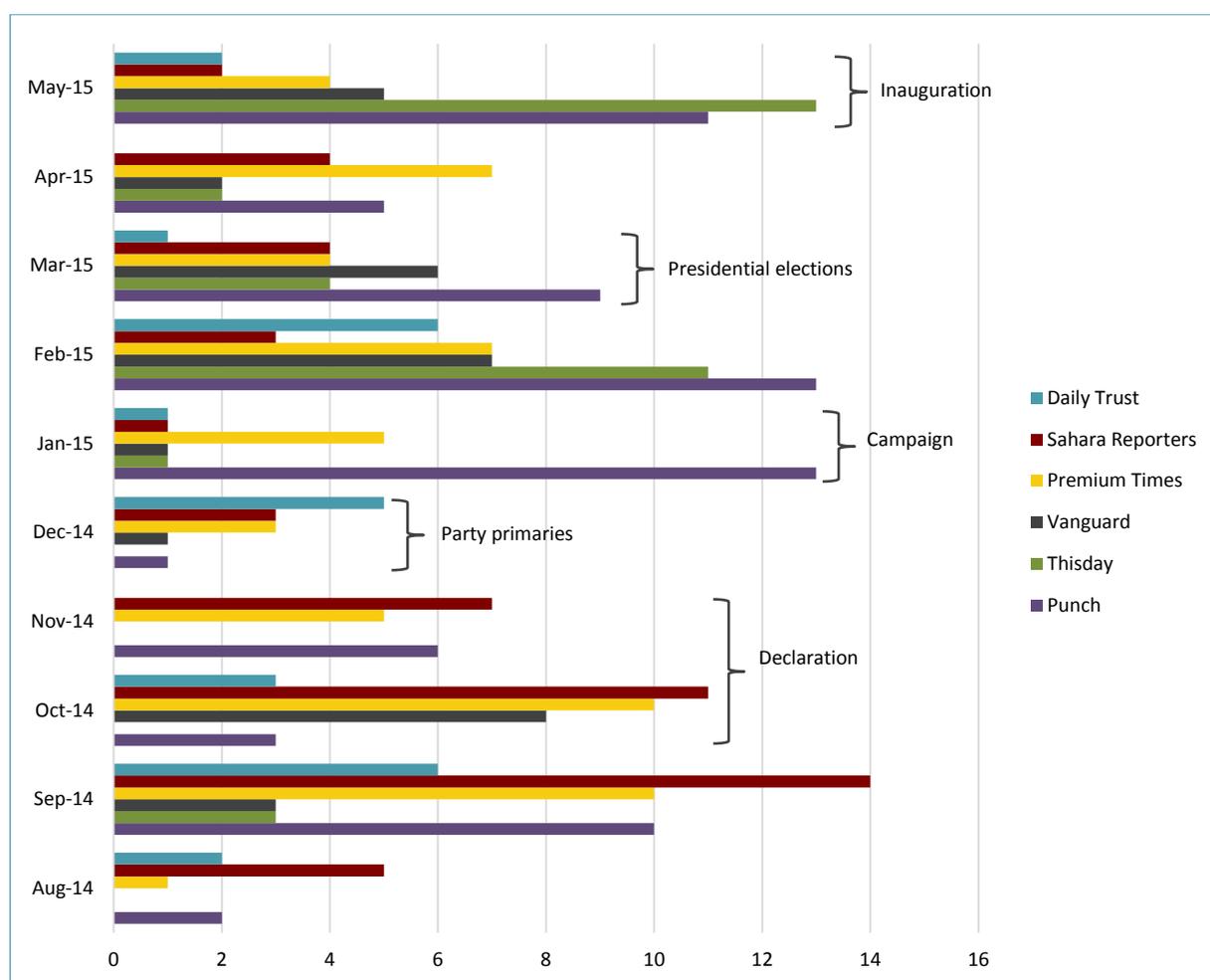
### 2.5.3. Trends

#### Increased coverage of corruption/anti-corruption stories

In simple numerical terms, corruption reportage positively correlates with the electoral cycle. We observed a general upward trend in corruption reportage at the start of the electoral cycle, beginning with aspirant declarations and party primaries. This correlation can be seen in the spikes in coverage recorded in Table 3 between September 2014 and March 2015, which correspond with candidate declarations, party primaries and the elections themselves. Around the critical electoral months– the candidate declarations in October and November of 2014 and again in February 2015 which was the month originally selected for the elections<sup>23</sup> – a spike in the rate of corruption coverage can be observed. Compared to the preceding months, September and October 2014 saw a 360% and 250% increase in coverage, respectively.

<sup>23</sup> 2015 presidential election was initially scheduled for 14 February 2014, but was postponed to 28 March 2014 due to poor distribution of voter cards and threats from Boko Haram. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/176445-full-inec-official-statement-on-postponement-of-2015-elections.html>

Figure 17: Monthly trends in corruption and anti-corruption reporting



Sources: OCJD, 2018

### Rising politicisation of corruption coverage

As corruption coverage increased, the stories became increasingly politicised. For instance, existing corruption charges were heavily politicised by individual parties and their surrogates and resulted in unfiltered media coverage of the issue. Although the \$20 billion Diezani scandal broke in 2013,<sup>24</sup> it took on a distinctively new political slant in 2014 and 2015, for example. Seizing on the scandal and the ensuing probe by legislators, the opposition APC accused the oil and finance ministers of collusion and alleged that the oil minister drew from unremitted NNPC funds to support the President's political campaign. On 11 February 2015 the *Premium Times*' headline read: 'EXCLUSIVE: Jonathan's campaign chief, others divert N155bn crude oil money to "corrupt Zambian officials"'.

<sup>24</sup> See Reuters report on the scandal: Special Report: Anatomy of Nigeria's \$20 billion "leak," available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-election-banker-specialreport/special-report-anatomy-of-nigerias-20-billion-leak-idUSKBN0LA0X820150206>.

### Duplication, repetition and excessive coverage

On closer inspection of the news reports under review, we found that certain media organisations merely produced multiple versions of particular stories, often with minimal updates on specific corruption cases. Consequently, individual issues were repeated multiple times by the same organisation, creating the impression of heightened coverage of the issues. An example is *Punch's* 2014 coverage of the Diezani scandal. Between 21 and 27 March 2014, the newspaper published five different reports on the legislative probe of the Diezani scandal, which had then expanded to the oil minister's private-sector dealings and the use of private jets. Most of these follow-up stories added minimal information to the main story, however, and yet they were mostly published as front-page reports. For instance, on 23 March the front-page story read 'Diezani jet scandal: House to summon aircraft owner', and then on 23 March it read 'Diezani jet scandal: Reps to hire aviation expert'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Section 2.4.1 for more on the Diezani scandal.

### 3. Consequence mapping

As a final step, the question remains: why does anti-corruption coverage matter? This question tackles the constitutional role of the media to hold the various arms of government to account through necessary checks and balances. In other words, given the media's focus on corruption, what is the direct impact of this on the behaviour of state institutions, especially the executive arm of government?

To respond to these questions, we conducted a consequence mapping of corruption and anti-corruption reportage in the Nigerian media within the context of the 2015 elections. The study focused on the tail end of the election cycle, the elections themselves and the immediate post-election period, when actual policy-making and policy implementation and project planning and project implementation are executed. This impact-mapping exercise measured possible consequences of anti-corruption/corruption media coverage on policy reforms, especially in the immediate period following the change in government in 2015. For simplicity, the mapping focused on government action in the form of Executive Bills sent to the National Assembly.

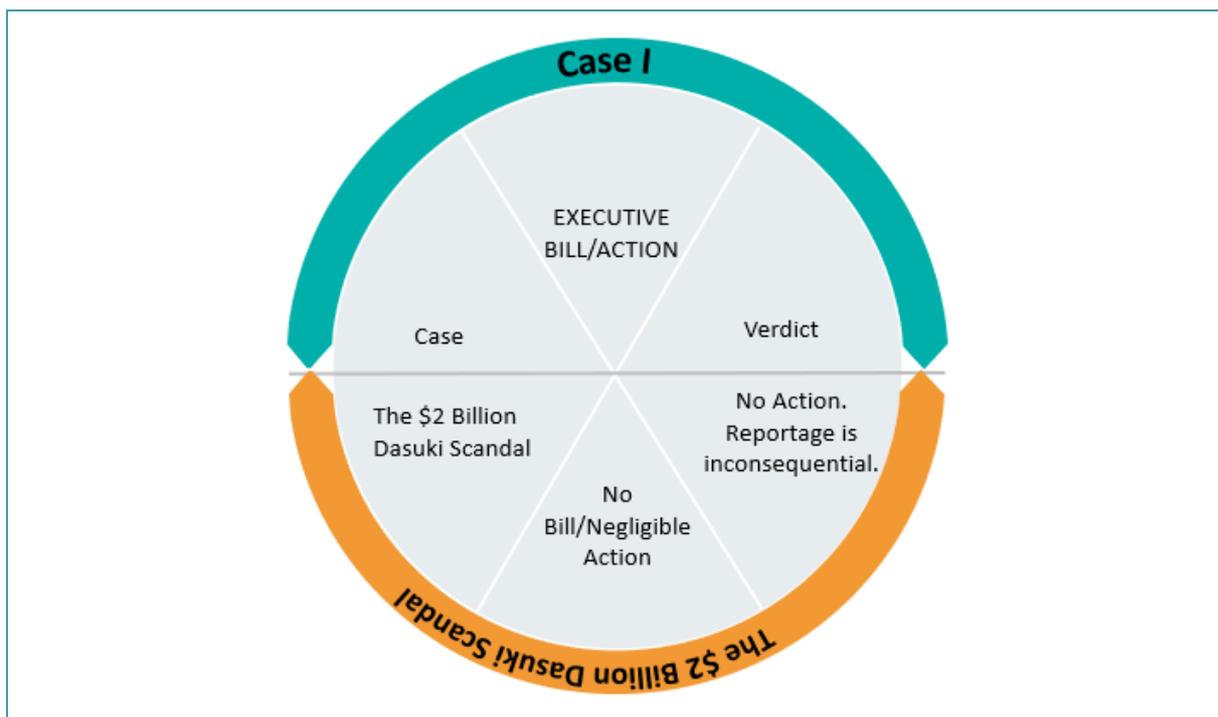
One point of contention in analysing the possible consequences of corruption reportage is that the administration necessarily requires new policies, projects or programmes to combat existing problems of corruption. Arguably, existing legal provisions (see section 1.1) address most of the criminal activities or corrupt practices described in this report. Therefore, it is a challenge to measure (with any degree of certainty) whether legal or prosecutorial outcomes are merely the result of routine, institutionalised processes or whether they are indeed a result of the new administration's efforts to implement legislation. Nevertheless, the consequence mapping exercise sought to measure the correlation, or otherwise, between corruption coverage and policy outcomes, whether as a result of the creation of new policies, projects or programmes or via the resuscitation of existing provisions.

The following subsections review the policy responses to the four high-profile corruption cases discussed previously in section 2.4.

### 3.1. Case I: The \$2 billion Dasuki scandal

The Dasuki Scandal, which is now a money laundering case, remains one of the biggest failures of the Buhari administration. Sambo Dasuki, former head of the NSA, was first charged in 2015 and is currently being tried in the Federal High Court in Abuja. The executive arm of the government has continued to flout judicial processes and has ignored court orders, including those granting administrative bail to Dasuki. By July 2018, the courts had issued six judgements ordering that the former security chief be released on bail, each of which has been ignored.<sup>26</sup> The executive arm's continued refusal to release Dasuki implies that media coverage of this high-profile case and the blatant disregard for judicial processes by the APC government has not resulted in change, particularly with regards to the government responding to particular court judgements. Furthermore, there appears to be no executive action on the main substance of the Dasuki case: that is, to restrict discretionary access to huge funds by the overall intelligence organ of the state. Neither have there been government policies to ensure more transparency and accountability in the security sector.

**Figure 18: Policy outcomes from media coverage of the Dasuki Scandal**



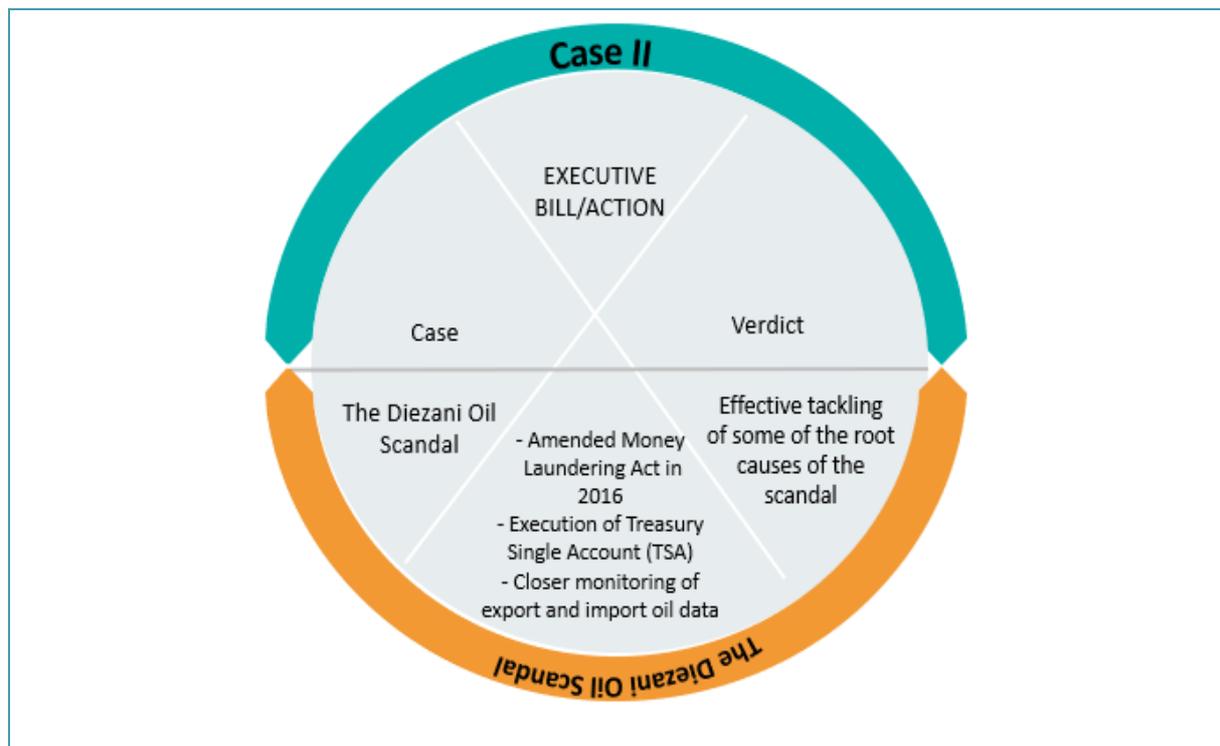
Source: OCJD (2018)

<sup>26</sup> See Mbachu and Ibukun (2018) on the President's tendency to ignore democratic processes owing to his history as a former military dictator.

### 3.2. Case II: The Diezani oil scandal

The corrupt practices of the NNPC and the former minister of petroleum resources, Diezani Alison-Madueke, were heavily reported in the media. However, it is debatable as to whether the policy directions of the executive arm of the APC government post-election were a direct response to this corruption case or not. For example, the Money Laundering Act had already undergone a major amendment in 2011 to expand the conception of predicate crime beyond narcotics and similar criminal activities. The Act was then amended further in 2016 to expand the mandate of relevant financial entities on currency and the reporting of suspicious transactions in order to strengthen overall tracking procedures. The Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy, which centralises the financial accounts of the federal government and helps to plug leaks, was executed by the incoming APC government, but it was a pre-2015 election policy that had already been fleshed out by the Jonathan government. Similarly, successful implementation of the CBN's Bank Verification Number policy, a biometric system that streamlines bank account ownership to ensure transparency in banking transactions, was set in motion by the previous PDP government in February 2014. Nonetheless, there is a strong case to be made for crediting policy or programmatic actions to the Buhari administration, even if only for executing these policies.

**Figure 19: Policy outcomes from media coverage of the Diezani scandal**



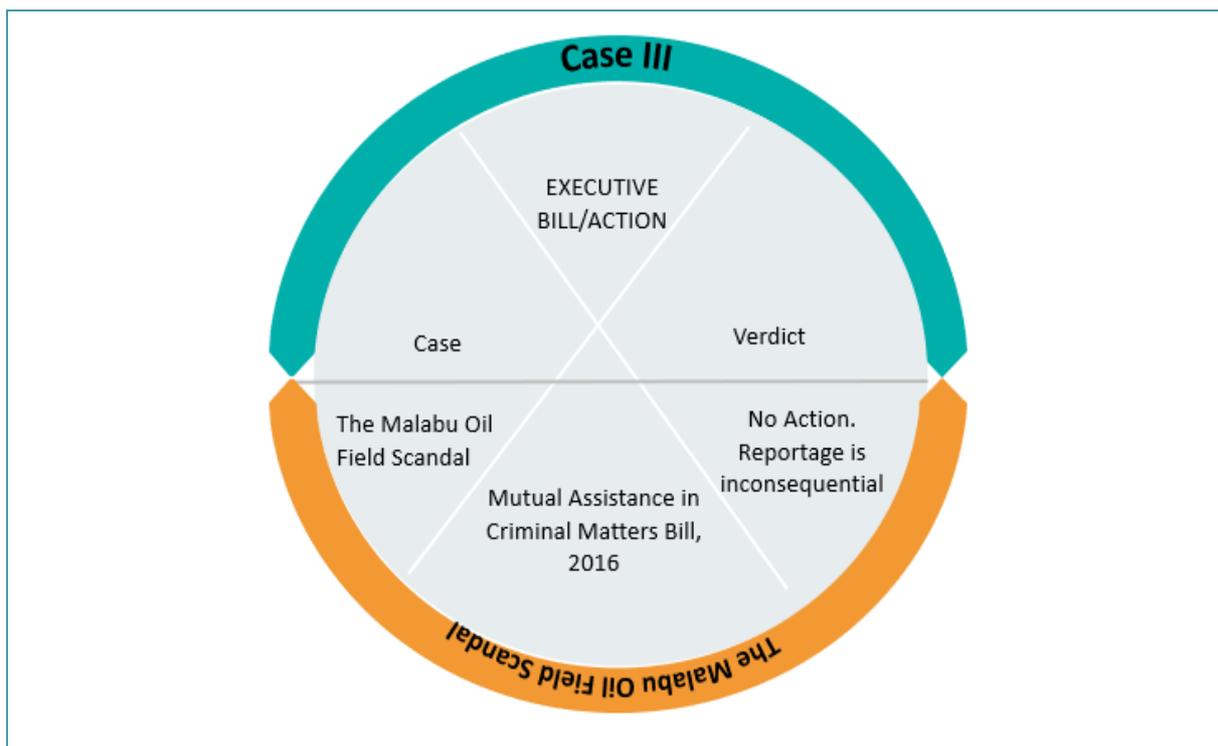
Source: OCJD (2018)

### 3.3. CASE III: The Malabu oil field scandal

As a crime involving high-level government actors that commenced prior to Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 and which continued through the Jonathan era, the Malabu bribery scheme has defied all existing legal provisions. The case highlights two factors that are endemic to corrupt practices: 1) the weak legal system or prosecutorial power of relevant agencies (such as the EFCC and ICPC) and 2) the less-than-transparent procurement process in government bureaucracies (for instance, in the process of obtaining oil licences).

There is a strong argument that Nigeria has failed to show adequate initiative in tackling either of the above factors, and that media coverage of this case has been inconsequential. Whereas international actors involved in various stages of the scandal are facing prosecution in the Netherlands, Italy and the United Kingdom, Nigeria has barely taken legal action against the key perpetrators. This is in spite of existing mutual assistance legal provisions, including the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Bill which was put to the National Assembly in 2016.

**Figure 20: Policy outcomes from media coverage of the Malabu oil field scandal**



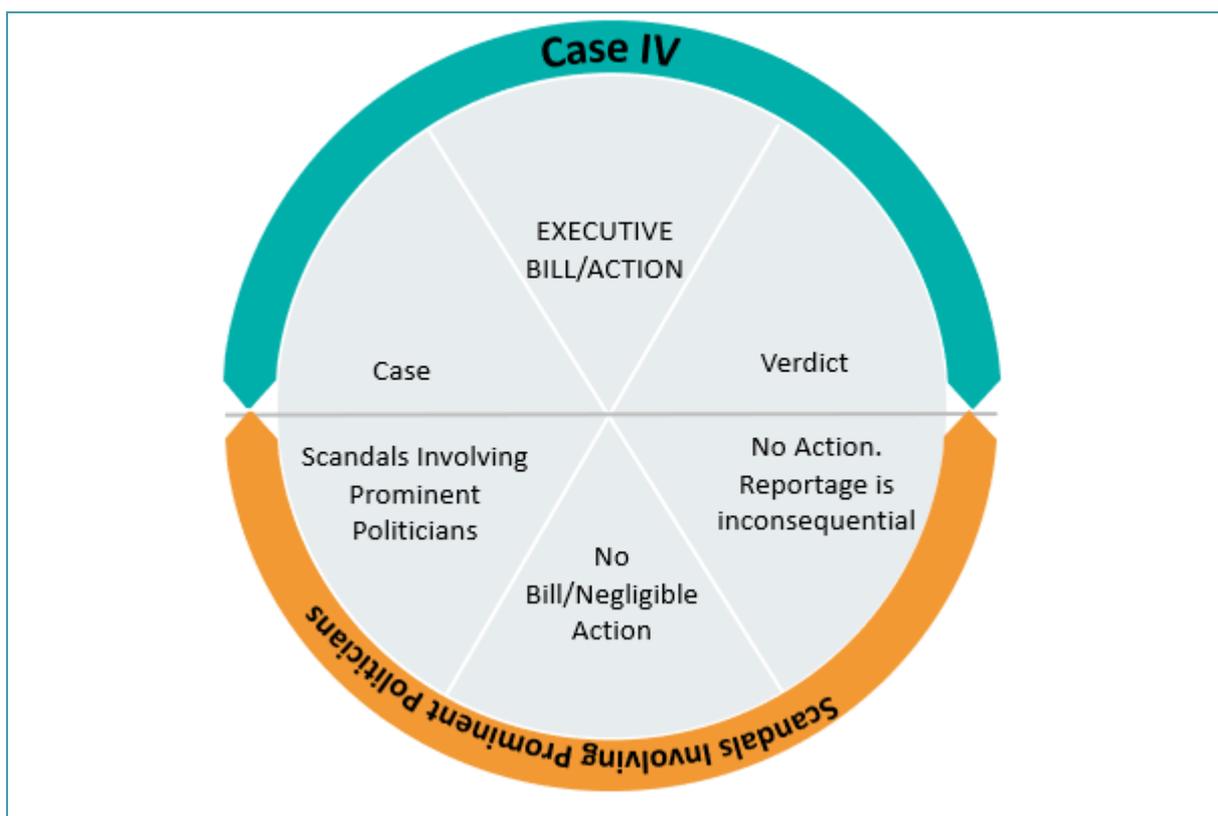
Source: OCJD (2018)

### 3.4. CASE IV: Scandals involving prominent politicians

Between 2015 and July 2018, the Buhari government sent just 12 Executive Bills to the National Assembly, only three of which were related to anti-corruption (*Thisday*, 2018). This illustrates, quite clearly, how the APC's pre-election rhetoric on corruption has not translated into measurable policy outcomes, in spite of the media support it received in propagating anti-corruption sentiments. While acknowledging that legislative bills are just one way to implement an anti-corruption agenda, the study has not uncovered any identifiable policy or programmatic action plan by the APC administration from which to measure the success of its agenda.

Rather, the post-election period has seen multiple shoddily arranged prosecutions of prominent politicians and increasingly politicised judicial processes, which have barely resulted in the conviction of these key political actors. Instead, poor prosecutorial processes have further degraded existing law enforcement and legal institutions and have eroded public trust in the system.

**Figure 21: Policy outcomes from media coverage of scandals involving prominent politicians**



Source: OCJD (2018)

## 4. Conclusion

There is no evidence that Nigeria's enduring struggle with corruption – and its global reputation for it – has lessened in the last decade. The anti-corruption rhetoric of the current APC government, which began pre-election as Nigeria's most important contemporary opposition party, has not translated into substantive anti-corruption policy-making, programmes or projects. This is despite media support for the government's anti-corruption messaging and almost unfiltered coverage of the APC's criticism of the PDP during the election cycle.

Rather than affecting policy-making, we observed that the voyeuristic tendency of the corruption news coverage detracted from any coverage of the institutional and developmental effects of corruption in Nigeria's executive system. The media coverage failed to engender public interest or shape public opinion towards ensuring government accountability.

Despite this, it is undeniable that the media played a supplementary role in highlighting particular corruption scandals. In itself, such coverage raised public awareness, expanded the discourse and made corruption a central issue during the 2015 elections. However, we observed that the organisational structure of news outlets – especially media ownership – impedes the constitutional role of the media and often determines the degree of editorial independence of a newspaper and hence the coverage of corruption stories. As seen in the *Thisday* coverage of the Dasuki scandal, media ownership and particular political affiliations and sympathies often serve to suppress critical coverage. On the other hand, the relative editorial independence of *Punch* is evident in its coverage of the cross-section of corruption stories in the period under review, while *Premium Times'* guiding principles and focus on investigative journalism are reflected in its coverage of the Malabu scandal. Ultimately, expectations for the media to fulfil an independent and unhindered fourth pillar are ambitious yet achievable.

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