



## IMPACTS OF NIGERIAN TELEVISION AUTHORITY (NTA) REPORTAGE ON ABEOKUTA RESIDENTS' OPINION OF CORRUPTION IN BUHARI'S ADMINISTRATIONS (2015-2023)

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### Abstract

This study examined the impacts of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) reportage on Abeokuta residents' opinion of corruption in Buhari's administrations (2015-2023). The objectives were to find out the level of Abeokuta residents' awareness of NTA reportage on corruption in Buhari's administration; examine Abeokuta residents' opinion of NTA's objectivity in reporting corruption during Buhari's administration and ascertain Abeokuta residents' opinion on the impacts of NTA's corruption reportage in Buhari's administration. The Agenda setting theory was the theoretical framework. Survey served as research design while questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The researchers found that NTA's corruption reportage during Buhari's administration had both positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts include increased pressure on the government to curb corruption, strengthened anti-corruption agencies, and recovery of stolen funds. Based on the findings, it was recommended among other things that the media should give more attention to the issue of corruption to set the agenda for the public to focus on this important issue and that this can be achieved by increasing the frequency and depth of coverage of corruption-related issues.

**Keywords:** Muhammadu Buhari, public opinion, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), corruption, media reportage.

### Introduction

Corruption has been a major challenge in Nigeria, with successive governments making promises to tackle the issue but with little success (Ogbeide&Ewemade, 2021). The administration of Muhammadu Buhari came into power in 2015 with a promise to fight corruption and restore accountability in the country. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), as the national broadcaster, has a significant role to play in shaping public opinion on issues related to corruption in the country. NTA has a large viewership and is seen as a trusted source of news and information in Nigeria by many people (Nwaoboli, 2023a). It is a government-owned television station that operates as a public service broadcaster in Nigeria. More so, it is the largest television network in the country and has a wide reach across the country, with several channels that cater to different audiences (Nwaoboli, 2023a). NTA's news programmes are seen as a major source of information for many Nigerians, and the station plays a significant role in shaping public opinion on various issues (Nwaoboli, 2023a).

The issue of corruption has been a major topic of discussion in Nigeria, and the Buhari administration considered it a priority to tackle the issue (Oyibode, 2017). The administration launched several initiatives aimed at fighting corruption, including the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy (Olu-Adeyemi, 2018). NTA has covered these developments and other issues related to corruption in its news programmes.

Public opinion, as formed and influenced by the media, can exert pressure on the government to take stronger anti-corruption actions or defend its existing approach (Akor, 2014; Iheanacho et al., 2021). However, allegations have been made regarding political interference in NTA's editorial independence and reporting. This raises questions

about the neutrality and impartiality of NTA's corruption coverage regarding Buhari's administrations (Okon, 2018). Nevertheless, as the most widely watched television network in the country, NTA remains one of the most significant shapers of Nigerians' perceptions of the scale and impact of corruption in Nigeria (Nwaoboli, 2023a).

A study of NTA news reports on corruption during the period of Buhari's administration can provide insights into the influence of NTA reportage on public opinion of corruption. The analysis can help to identify the dominant themes and frames used in the news reports and how they may have influenced public opinion about corruption in Buhari's administration. On this premise, this study examined the impacts of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) reportage on Abeokuta residents' opinion of corruption in President Buhari's administrations.

### **Statement of the problem**

The influence of NTA's reportage on public opinion of corruption in President Buhari's administration is a complex issue. There is no easy answer to the question of whether NTA's coverage has been fair or biased. However, NTA has a significant influence on public opinion (Nwaoboli, 2023a) and its coverage of corruption is likely to have a major impact on how people view the Buhari administrations. Some scholars such as Oyedele (2018) argue that government-owned media coverage of corruption has been biased and has unfairly targeted the Buhari administration. They point to the fact that government media has often given more airtime to opposition figures who have accused the government of corruption.

Others might argue that government media's coverage of corruption has been fair and has simply reflected the reality of the situation. Ugwuoke (2017) points to the fact that there have been a number of high-profile corruption cases involving members of the Buhari administration. They also argue that NTA has a responsibility to report on corruption, regardless of who is in power. While there are several studies such as Touitou (2016) on media coverage of corruption in president Buhari's administration, there are barely studies on the impacts of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) reportage on Abeokuta residents' opinion of corruption in Buhari's administrations. This gap in literature is the problem this study covered.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study were to:

1. find out the level of Abeokuta residents' awareness of NTA reportage on corruption in Buhari's administration
2. examine Abeokuta residents' opinion of NTA's objectivity in reporting corruption during Buhari's administration
3. ascertain Abeokuta residents' opinion on the impacts of NTA's corruption reportage in Buhari's administration

### **Literature Review**

#### **Concept of Public Opinion**

Public opinion refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and views held by a group of people on a particular issue or topic (Ugwuoke, 2017). It is the collective perception of individuals within a given society or community regarding a specific issue or phenomenon (Gamson, 2004). Public opinion can be influenced by various factors, including personal experiences, cultural norms, media, education, and political ideology (Heath, Fisher & Smith, 2005).

Public opinion plays a crucial role in democratic societies as it helps to shape public policy and guide decision-making by elected officials and other leaders. It can also influence the behaviour and actions of individuals and organisations (Heath, et al, 2005; Iheanacho et al. 2021). Public opinion can be measured through various methods, such as surveys, polls, and focus groups. It can also be influenced by various factors, including the media, political campaigns, interest groups, and social movements. The media, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping public opinion by providing information and shaping the narratives that drive public discourse. Political campaigns and interest groups also seek to influence public opinion by promoting their agendas and messaging to potential supporters (Ugwuoke, 2017).

Public opinion can have significant impacts on society, including influencing political outcomes, shaping cultural norms, and driving social change (Gamson, 2004). It can also serve as a tool for holding leaders and institutions accountable for their actions and decisions. Public opinion is a complex and dynamic concept that plays a crucial role in shaping society and influencing decision-making. Its measurement and analysis are critical for understanding the attitudes and beliefs of individuals within a given community or society and informing policy and decision-making processes (Ugwuoke, 2017).

#### **Overview of Corruption**

Corruption is a multifaceted concept that can be defined in various ways. Generally, it refers to the abuse of power for personal gain, often involving the exchange of money, favours, gifts, or other benefits (Ugwuoke, 2017). Corruption can occur in any sector, including government, business, academia, and civil society organisations. Yusha'u (2009)

sees corruption as bribery, embezzlement, fraud, nepotism, favoritism, extortion, and money laundering. Touitou (2016) added that it can also manifest through illicit practices such as smuggling, tax evasion, and public procurement irregularities. Corruption undermines the rule of law, weakens institutions, and erodes public trust, which can have significant negative impacts on economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability.

Corruption can be categorised into two main types: grand corruption and petty corruption. Grand corruption involves high-level officials and large sums of money, while petty corruption involves lower-level officials and smaller amounts of money. Grand corruption is often more complex and difficult to detect and tends to have more severe consequences, while petty corruption is more visible and can be easier to address (Okon, 2018). Corruption is a complex phenomenon that requires multidimensional solutions. Effective anti-corruption measures include strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting transparency and accountability, enhancing public participation, and improving legal and regulatory frameworks (Edmond & Wilson, 2018). It may also involve promoting ethical values and social norms to discourage corrupt practices and increasing public awareness on the negative impacts of corruption. Additionally, international cooperation and assistance can play a significant role in combating corruption, particularly in countries with weak governance structures (Edmond & Wilson, 2018).

### **Overview of Muhammadu Buhari's administration**

Muhammadu Buhari is a Nigerian politician who served as the President of Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. His administration focused on several key areas, including anti-corruption, national security, economic diversification and infrastructure development (Edmond & Wilson, 2018). One of the most prominent aspects of Buhari's administration was its focus on fighting corruption. Buhari ran on a platform that promised to tackle corruption head-on, and his administration implemented several anti-corruption measures, such as the establishment of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC) and the Whistleblower Policy (Signature, 2018). These efforts resulted in the recovery of billions of naira in stolen funds and the prosecution of several high-profile corruption cases (Okon, 2018).

Another major focus of Buhari's administration was national security. Nigeria was facing significant security challenges during his tenure, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, banditry, and kidnapping in various parts of the country. His administration implemented several measures to address these challenges, including the establishment of the Operation Lafiya Dole military task force and the cooperation with neighbouring countries in the fight against terrorism (Okon, 2018).

The Buhari administration also focused on economic diversification and infrastructure development. The government implemented several policies and programmes aimed at promoting agriculture, solid minerals development, and small and medium enterprises. Additionally, the administration invested in infrastructure development, particularly in the areas of roads, railways, and power. Buhari's administration was characterised by its focus on anti-corruption, national security, economic diversification, and infrastructure development. While there were some successes in these areas, the administration also faced significant challenges, including criticism over its handling of the economy and concerns over human rights violations by security agencies (Oyibode, 2017).

### **Corruption under Buhari's administrations**

Buhari came into power with a strong anti-corruption mandate, vowing to fight corruption which was seen as endemic in Nigeria. However, critics argue that Buhari's anti-corruption fight has been selective, targeting mostly opponents while shielding members of his party and government from investigation as many big corruption cases involving members of his party and government were not pursued (Oyibode, 2017). Also, several corruption scandals rocked Buhari's government, including allegations of budget padding, diversion of funds, inflated contracts etc. Many ministers and government officials were accused of corruption but few faced prosecution (Ogbeide&Ewemade, 2021). Nigeria actually dropped in the Transparency International corruption index during Buhari's presidency, from 136th least corrupt country in 2015 to 146th in 2019. This indicates corruption did not reduce under Buhari.

Also, the economy was negatively impacted by corruption under Buhari. Nigeria lost an estimated \$600 billion to corruption from 1960 to 2019, according to the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (Ogbeide&Ewemade, 2021). Much of this loss occurred during Buhari's rule. Additionally, corruption discouraged investment and hindered economic growth. The economy struggled during Buhari's presidency with two recessions as unemployment and poverty increased significantly. In the same vein, the media reporting of corruption was restricted under Buhari, potentially shielding some corruption cases from being exposed. Several journalists who

reported on corruption by the government were harassed or intimidated (Okon, 2018). While Buhari came into power with a strong mandate to fight corruption, many argue that corruption did not actually reduce significantly under his administration.

### **Role of the media in shaping public opinion on corruption in Nigeria**

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion on issues in society (Ajibulu & Nwaoboli, 2023; Nwaoboli, 2022; Nwaoboli, 2023b). In Nigeria, just like in other nations, the media has the potential to raise awareness about corruption, expose corrupt practices, and put pressure on the government to implement anti-corruption reforms (Okon, 2018; Nsude & Etumnu, 2023). According to Adigun and Adeyemi (2017), the media has the power to create awareness about corruption and expose corrupt practices, which can help to reduce the incidence of corruption in the country. The media can also shape public perception of corruption by highlighting the consequences of corrupt practices and the efforts of the government to fight corruption. However, the media itself is not free from corruption and this affects its ability to drive positive change.

Newspapers, radio, television, and online media expose instances of corruption and abuse of power in Nigeria on a daily basis. This helps inform the public about the scale and impact of corruption and can influence people's perceptions and attitudes (Omotosho & Edegoh, 2012). When the media investigates and reports widely on corruption scandals involving public officials and bodies, it shapes public opinion that corruption is prevalent and needs to be addressed urgently. The media can hold public officials accountable by asking tough questions, monitoring the implementation of anti-graft policies, and highlighting instances where corruption continues (Ojobor, 2014). This type of watchdog reporting can compel the government to take action on corruption cases and reforms. For example, investigative reporting by newspapers and online media has exposed large scale corruption in institutions like National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), putting pressure on the government to take action (Omotosho & Edegoh, 2012).

### **Empirical Review**

Edmond and Wilson (2018) assessed the media coverage of the anti-corruption efforts of Muhammadu Buhari's civilian administration in Nigeria. The study employed purposive and systematic sampling techniques to select *The Nation* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. A total of 48 editions spanning from July 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016, were subjected to analysis. The study employed framing and priming Theory. A coding sheet was employed as a research instrument to facilitate data collection efficiency, by illustrating the frequency, direction, and prominence of reports, thereby ensuring the acquisition of reliable and credible information. The data was presented using tables and simple percentages. The data obtained were analysed in accordance with the objectives and research inquiries of the study. During the research period, a total of 409 stories were covered by the selected newspapers. The total number of corruption-related items published by *The Nation* and *Daily Trust* were 233 and 176, respectively. According to the findings of the study, the selected newspapers consistently featured stories pertaining to corruption, which were predominantly positioned on the inner pages. Furthermore, the content of these stories was generally positive in nature. The researcher recommended that the mass media engage in comprehensive reporting and investigative journalism to uncover and reveal instances of misconduct, rather than simply presenting factual accounts of events.

Okon (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of the frequency, significance, and comprehensiveness of media coverage of the "fight" during the tenures of former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) and President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023) in Nigeria. The research methodology employed for generating the data was content analysis. Systematic sampling technique was used to select 39 issues of *The News* and TELL magazines from the initial three years of Obasanjo's tenure while a composite week sampling technique was used to select 26 issues of *The Sun* and the *Nigerian Chronicle* newspapers during the first half of 2017. The editorial pieces on corruption were categorised into bribery, forgery/perjury, fraud, misappropriation, and mismanagement. The units of analysis included news, features/opinions/columns, editorials, photographs/cartoons, advertorials, and letters to the editor. The evaluation criteria of prominence, depth, frequency, and tilt were utilised to assign scores. The theoretical framework was agenda-setting theory. The study concluded that the media coverage patterns during both administrations exhibited similarities and recommended that the government adopt a more assertive and comprehensive approach in combating corruption, while the media should strive to enhance its credibility, perseverance, and responsibility in reporting on issues related to anti-corruption efforts.

Olushola, Anjolaoluwa and Olufunmilayo (2014) research addressed the adverse impacts of corruption on the socioeconomic development of Nigeria using content analysis. Multi-stage sampling approach was used to identify

three newspapers, namely *Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The Guardian*. A total of 913 stories pertaining to corruption were scrutinised from the 540 issues that were selected for analysis. The study documented the frequency, nature, significance, spatial allocation, and extent of discourse pertaining to corruption in the media. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and means, were utilised to summarise the data. Results indicated that Nigerians perceive the political/government, service-oriented (e.g., banking and telecommunications), and sports sectors as the most corrupt.

Yushau's (2010) study examined the phenomenon of regional parallelism and its impact on the Nigerian media's portrayal of corruption. The interview guided was the research instrument and data were presented using tables. The findings of the study suggested that regionalism exerts a noteworthy influence on the practise of journalism in Nigeria. The researcher proposed the establishment of an unbiased commission to ensure the safety and protection of journalists operating in Africa in their coverage of corruption.

The earlier studies and the current study all examined the impact of media coverage on corruption in Nigeria. While the earlier studies analysed the coverage of corruption across various media outlets and suggested that media coverage could shape public opinion, the current study focused specifically on the NTA's reportage on corruption in Buhari's administrations. The current study uses survey to collect data on public opinion of corruption in Buhari's administration, and is more specific in its research question and methodology.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

This study is anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory. The theory is a mass communication theory that was first proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the early 1970s (Ovie & Nwaoboli, 2022). It suggests that the media has the power to influence the importance of issues on the public agenda by selecting and emphasising certain issues over others (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). The theory is rooted in the idea that the media does not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about (Nwaoboli, 2022b; Alphonsus, et al., 2022).

According to Arijeniwa, Nwaoboli, Ajimokunola & Uwuoruya (2022), the basic tenets of Agenda Setting Theory are:

- a. The media has the power to set the agenda and determine what issues are important to the public.
- b. The media's ability to set the agenda is based on its ability to select and emphasize certain issues over others.
- c. The public's perception of the importance of issues is shaped by the amount of media coverage devoted to those issues.
- d. The media's influence on public opinion is indirect and operates through the agenda-setting process.

By using Agenda Setting Theory to examine the impact of NTA reportage on public opinion of corruption in Buhari's administration, the researcher built on existing knowledge and contributed to a deeper understanding of the relationship between the media and public opinion.

### **Methodology**

The study focused on the population of Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun State, Nigeria, with an estimated population of 593,000 according to City population (2022). A Cochran sample size determination technique was utilised to calculate the sample size of 385 respondents, with a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%. The formula used was  $n = (z^2 * p * q) / (e^2)$ , where n represents the sample size, z is the standard normal deviate for the chosen confidence level, p is the estimated proportion of the population with the characteristic of interest, q is 1 - p, and e is the margin of error. To select respondents, a survey research design was employed, and the random sampling technique was used. Survey was used because the study is a perception study and random sampling technique was adopted to allow all members of the society equal opportunity of being selected. A structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions was used to collect data, with the assistance of a trained research assistant. The questionnaire consisted three items and it was validated by two professors in the field of mass communication. However, sequel to the distribution of 385 copies of questionnaire, seven copies were lost while 378 were retrieved consisting 98% return rate. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages. The use of these methods ensured that the sample was representative of the population, and the data collected was reliable and accurate.

### Data Presentation

**Table 1: Level of public awareness of NTA reportage on corruption in Buhari's administration**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	26	6.5
High	35	9.3
Low	97	25.7
Very Low	134	35.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Data on table 1 showed that there is a relatively low level of public awareness of NTA reportage on corruption in Buhari's administration, with the majority of respondents perceiving the level of awareness as either "Low" or "Very Low". This implies that the efforts made by NTA to report on corruption in Buhari's administration may not have been as effective in reaching the general public as desired or that the reportage was low.

**Table 2: NTA reportage of corruption during Buhari's administration was objective**

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean
I perceive NTA's reportage of corruption during Buhari's administration as objective	10 (2.6)	40 (2.3)	132 (34.9)	196 (51.9)	2.64

KEY: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Data on table 2 suggest that NTA's reportage of corruption during Buhari's administration was not objective. This may indicate a lack of trust or confidence in NTA's reporting on corruption in the administration, or a perception that the reporting was biased or influenced by other factors such as ownership of the medium which might have restrained the station from objective reportage of corruption in the administration.

**Table 3: Impacts of NTA's corruption reportage in Nigeria in Buhari's administration**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
Increased public awareness on corruption index	4	1.1
Increased pressure on the government to curb corruption	71	18.7
Improved transparency and accountability in public service	23	6.1
Strengthened anti-corruption agencies	60	15.9
Recovery of stolen funds	52	13.8
Shielded corrupt practices	90	23.8
Had no effect	78	20.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 3 showed that NTA's corruption reportage during Buhari's administration had both positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts included increased pressure on the government to curb corruption, strengthened anti-corruption agencies, and recovery of stolen funds. However, a significant number of respondents believed that NTA's reportage had shielded corrupt practices or had no effect at all.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study submit that NTA's reportage on corruption during Buhari's administration did not help curb the menace and that there were concerns among the public about the objectivity of NTA's reporting and the impact of its corruption reportage. The data from Table 1 revealed that there is a relatively low level of public awareness of NTA reportage on corruption in Buhari's administration, with the majority of respondents perceiving the level of awareness as either "Low" or "Very Low". This finding is consistent with previous studies that have

highlighted the need for increased efforts to raise public awareness of corruption in Nigeria (Olu-Adeyemi, 2019; Oyedele, 2018). It also suggests a need for improved communication and education efforts to raise awareness and understanding of the issue of corruption and its impact on society (Oyedele, 2018).

Findings also showed that majority of respondents did not perceive NTA's reportage of corruption during Buhari's administration as objective. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted concerns about the objectivity and independence of the media in Nigeria (Ogbeide & Ewemade, 2021; Oyedele, 2018). It may also reflect broader concerns about the influence of political and economic interests on media reporting on corruption and other sensitive issues (Ogbeide & Ewemade, 2021; Oyedele, 2018).

More so, the researcher found that NTA's corruption reportage during Buhari's administration had both positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts included increased pressure on the government to curb corruption, strengthened anti-corruption agencies, and recovery of stolen funds. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the role of the media in promoting transparency and accountability in the fight against corruption (Olu-Adeyemi, 2019).

The findings of the study align with the agenda-setting theory, which suggests that the media has the power to shape public perception and prioritise certain issues through its selection and presentation of news. The study revealed that NTA's reportage on corruption during Buhari's administration had limited effectiveness in curbing the issue, indicating that NTA may not have successfully set the agenda in terms of emphasising the importance of addressing corruption as a pressing societal problem. The concerns raised by the public about the objectivity of NTA's reporting also align with the agenda-setting theory, as it suggests that the media's portrayal of corruption may influence the public's understanding and prioritization of the issue.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has shed light on NTA's reportage of corruption during Buhari's administrations in Nigeria. The researchers conclude that NTA's reportage of the issue was not sufficient in reaching the general public and that their reportage did not reduce corruption in Buhari's administrations. It emphasised the need of giving corruption-related concerns greater attention as well as the significance of media outlets in establishing the agenda for the public to concentrate on key topics like corruption. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Media outlets in Nigeria should focus on improving their reportage on corruption by increasing public awareness of the issue and promoting transparency and accountability.
2. Media outlets should ensure their reportage is objective and independent, avoiding any perception of bias or shielding of corrupt practices.
3. Media outlets should give more attention to the issue of corruption to set the agenda for the public to focus on this important issue. The government and other stakeholders should support media outlets in their efforts to improve their reportage on corruption, recognising the important role of the media in promoting transparency and accountability in the fight against corruption.

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