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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA DURING THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY RULE IN NIGERIA (1999-2015)

Ferdinard Obasi[1]* & Chimdiadi Phoebe Nzurumike[2]

[1,2]Department of Mass Communication, Caritas University Enugu, Nigeria

*amokovia@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: Nigeria's media landscape shifted significantly when democratic rule was restored in 1999, ending years of military control. This study examines the role of the mass media in Nigeria's democratic consolidation during the People's Democratic Party's 16-year rule, from 29 May 1999 to 29 May 2015. It tests the liberal democratic claim that expanded press freedom automatically strengthens accountability. Using desk research and content analysis of laws, NBC data, academic literature, and NGO reports, the paper applies Agenda-Setting Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, and Political Economy of the Media to assess media performance. Findings reveal that legal-institutional reforms were substantial: Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution restored free expression, the NBC licensed 147 private radio and TV stations, and the 2011 Freedom of Information Act gave journalists statutory access to records. Digital platforms after 2010 further broadened public debate, with #OccupyNigeria and #BringBackOurGirls illustrating citizen-led agenda-setting. Media exposure of corruption rose by 40% between 2011 and 2014. Yet watchdog outcomes were limited. Of 312 major corruption cases reported from 1999–2015, only 7.7% ended in conviction. Political economy constraints persisted: 11 of 15 national dailies had links to political financiers; 60–70% of newspaper revenue came from government advertising; the NBC issued 147 fines and 12 closures, 81% targeting political content; and 74% of journalists earned below N50,000 monthly, entrenching brown envelope practice. The study concludes that Nigeria experienced "liberalization without independence." The media gained agenda-setting power and could mobilize against policies like the Third Term bid, but could not ensure sanctions. The paper recommends media funding reform, narrower NBC powers, stronger FOI enforcement, journalist welfare standards, and institutional synergy between media and anti-graft bodies.

Keywords: Mass Media, Democratic Consolidation, PDP, Political Economy, Agenda-Setting, FOI Act.

INTRODUCTION

Following the Cold War, the global "third wave" of democratization cast the mass media as a key driver of both democratic change and stability. Across Africa, opening up the media was seen as a way to break state control of information and promote government accountability. Nigeria became a major example of this process when it returned to civilian rule on 29 May 1999. After 16 straight years of military rule marked by restrictive decrees, newspaper bans, and jailing of reporters, the 1999 Constitution restored freedom of expression and tasked the press, under Section 22, with monitoring governance. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the first elections and remained in power continuously for 16 years until 2015, the longest period any party has ruled Nigeria under democracy.

During those years, the media sector changed significantly. Deregulation of broadcasting expanded rapidly, the number of private newspapers grew, and online platforms became prominent after 2010. By 2015, Nigeria operated the largest media industry in Africa by size. Yet the country still placed 136th out of 175 on Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating that accountability remained poor even as the media grew. This gap between greater press freedom and weak democratic outcomes is the focus of this seminar. The paper argues that under the PDP, Nigeria developed a media system that was legally free, but structurally captured; formal liberties increased, but political-economic pressures ensured that elites continued to dominate.

Statement of the Problem

Liberal democratic thought posits a straightforward link: greater press freedom produces stronger government accountability. The Nigerian experience between 1999 and 2015 challenges that claim. On paper, reforms were wide-ranging. The 1999 Constitution restored free expression, the National Broadcasting Commission approved licenses for 147 private radio and television outlets, and the Freedom of Information Act became law in 2011. In practice, journalistic exposure to corruption increased, and voter education reached citizens over five successive elections.

Yet outcomes did not match the expansion of media space. Fewer than 8% of high-profile corruption cases reported by the press resulted in convictions, and major scandals involving Halliburton, Siemens, and fuel subsidy payments ended with little or no punishment for key actors. This gap between increased media openness and persistent impunity defines the research problem. Despite having the most liberal media environment in its post-independence history, Nigeria's accountability record from 1999–2015 remained poor. The study therefore asks: were the barriers to accountability primarily legal, political, economic, or institutional? Answering this clarifies the limits of press freedom as a driver of democratic consolidation in transitional societies.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to:

1. Analyze the legal and institutional reforms that shaped the operations of the mass media from 1999 to 2015.
2. Examine how the media performed in fostering political awareness and shaping public debate across the five general elections held within the period.
3. Appraise the extent to which the media acted as a watchdog, as well as the factors that limited its ability to enforce accountability.
4. Investigate the political-economic conditions that constrained media independence during the PDP administration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Mass Media in Transitional Democracies

According to McQuail (2010), the media's main democratic roles are monitoring society, linking issues together, and mobilizing citizens for action. Norris (2000) argues that media produce a "virtuous circle" in which access to information enables citizens to push for improved governance. Yet, scholars like Bourgault (1995) and Nyamnjoh (2005) observe that in many African states after independence, the press often functioned as "lapdogs" for governments because of state ownership and patronage networks. Voltmer (2013) describes transitional democracies as having "hybrid media systems". Laws may guarantee freedom, but unofficial pressures, ownership patterns, and low professional standards mean autonomy is only partial. This paper assesses Nigeria's 1999–2015 period using this hybrid model.

Democratic Consolidation and the PDP 16 Years

Linz and Stepan (1996) explain democratic consolidation as a condition where democracy becomes "the only game in town" in terms of attitudes, behavior, and constitutional practice. Carothers (2002), however, points to "grey zone" systems where elections occur regularly but real accountability is missing. During PDP's 16 years in power, Nigeria avoided military intervention and conducted five successive elections, thereby satisfying procedural benchmarks. Yet Levitsky and Way (2010) classify such contexts as "competitive authoritarian" when ruling parties use state advantages to tilt the playing field. The key question for this study is whether the media helped Nigeria move beyond procedural democracy toward substantive consolidation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theories to explain media performance between 1999 and 2015: Agenda-Setting Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, and the Political Economy of the Media.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) and later expanded by McCombs et al. (2014), this theory argues that while the media may not tell people what to think, it is highly successful at telling them what to think about. By selecting, repeating, and framing issues, news outlets influence public priorities. During Nigeria's five general elections from 1999 to 2015, broadcast and print media repeatedly highlighted topics like corruption, power supply, and electoral violence. This focus shaped campaign debates and voter concerns. However, the theory also notes "second-level agenda-setting," where media tell audiences how to think about an issue through tone and attributes. Ownership bias meant some outlets framed opposition parties as unstable while presenting PDP incumbents as experienced, showing how agenda-setting can be skewed.

Social Responsibility Theory

Developed by the Hutchins Commission (1947) and elaborated by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), this theory holds that press freedom comes with obligations. Media should provide truthful, balanced reporting, serve as a forum for diverse views, and hold power to account. Section 22 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution reflects this doctrine by mandating the press to uphold the government's responsibility to the people. Between 1999 and 2015, Nigerian media met parts of this mandate by exposing scandals such as Halliburton and the fuel subsidy fraud. Yet the theory also expects financial independence and professional ethics. Poor salaries, "brown envelope" practices, and reliance on government advertising meant many outlets could not fully meet their social responsibility role, especially when powerful actors were involved.

Political Economy of the Media

Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model and Fuchs' (2018) update argue that five filters ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology shape news content even in formally free systems. In Nigeria 1999–2015, ownership was the dominant filter: many private radio/TV stations and newspapers were directly or indirectly linked to politicians, especially PDP governors and ministers. Advertising was the second filter, as government agencies were the largest ad buyers and could withdraw patronage from critical outlets. Sourcing favoured official statements, while "flak" took the form of NBC fines, license threats, or police harassment. The result was a media system that was liberalized in law but captured in practice. This theory explains why legal freedom did not translate to consistent watchdog journalism.

Integration: Agenda-Setting explains what the media covered, Social Responsibility defines what it should do, and Political Economy explains why it often failed. Together, they account for the "liberalized but captured" outcome of the PDP years.

Empirical Evidence on Media During the PDP Era, 1999–2015

The Obasanjo Administration 1999–2007: Liberalization Under Watch

Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution removed earlier decree-based bans, and the NBC began issuing more licenses. Table 3.1 illustrates this expansion.

Table A: Expansion of Private Broadcast Media, 1999–2007

Media Indicator	1999	2003	2007	% Change 1999 – 2007
Private FM Radio Outlets	1	14	34	3300%
Private TV Stations	1	8	17	1600%
Community Radio Licenses	0	0	2	New
24-Hour News Channels	0	1 (AIT)	3	New

Source: Adapted from National Broadcasting Commission (NBC, 2016); Ojebode (2018)

Despite this growth, political economy constraints were active. Ownership: Raypower/AIT was owned by Raymond Dokpesi, a PDP Board of Trustees member. Daily Trust was set up by northern political-business interests close to the PDP (Akinfeleye, 2008). Advertising: Oso (2012) estimates that between 2000 and 2007, 60–70% of newspaper income came from federal and state government adverts, allowing withdrawal of contracts as punishment.

Agenda-setting effects were visible. According to Ojo (2003), "corruption," "fuel price," and "Third Term" were the leading front-page topics from 2003–2006, compelling PDP to respond. Tell, The News, and The Source revealed the National ID Card fraud, the Tafa Balogun N17 billion police case, and Third Term inducements. Media framing of the Third Term bid as "dictatorial" helped civil society and the National Assembly mobilize, leading to its failure (Abati, 2016).

Yet watchdog limitations persisted. Saliu and Omotoso (2013) examined 78 key corruption reports between 1999 and 2007 and found only 6 convictions. When Insider Magazine published claims about Obasanjo's overseas accounts in 2002, its editors were detained by the SSS. The NBC imposed a N500,000 fine on AIT in 2005 over a documentary on economic policy (NBC, 2016). Pate and Dauda (2015) showed that 74% of journalists earned under N50,000 per month in 2006, compared to legislators' N10 million quarterly allowances, reinforcing the "brown envelope" culture. Hence, 1999–2007 produced more outlets but not more independence.

The Yar'Adua/Jonathan Period 2007–2015: FOI Act and Digital Shift

Two developments shaped these years: legal reform and technology.

Table B: Major Legal and Digital Developments, 2007–2015

Year	Event	Media Implication
2010	Nigerian Facebook users reach 3m	Growth of citizen reporting
2011	FOI Act passed	Legal basis to demand public records
2012	#OccupyNigeria protests	Social media coordinated shutdowns in cities
2013	Premium Times launched	Online-only outlet using FOI for investigations
2014	#BringBackOurGirls trends globally	Social platforms set agenda for legacy media
2015	Digital Switch Over pilot starts	Potential for over 100 TV channels

Source: Ihonvbere (2015); Ojebode (2018); FOI Coalition (2014)

The 2011 FOI Act reinforced Social Responsibility expectations. Premium Times and Sahara Reporters applied it to uncover the Stella Oduah N255m BMW case (2013), the Farouk Lawan $620,000 bribe (2012), and pension fraud. Ojebode and Adegbola (2014) recorded a 40% rise in investigative stories between 2011–2014 compared to 2007–2010. Still, 63% of MDAs failed to comply with FOI requests and faced no penalties (FOI Coalition, 2014), while exemption clauses were frequently misused.

Digital platforms broke traditional gatekeeping. #OccupyNigeria in January 2012, triggered by fuel subsidy removal, was planned on social media and compelled mainstream outlets to adopt a citizen-driven agenda (Ihonvbere, 2015). #BringBackOurGirls in 2014 pressured NTA and FRCN to cover the story after international attention.

Political economy constraints were adapted but remained. Ownership patterns persisted, as shown in Table C.

Table C: Ownership Links of Selected Media Outlets, 2007–2015

Media Outlet	Owner/Key Figure	Political Tie	Coverage Tendency
AIT/ Raypower	Raymond Dokpesi	PDP BoT Member	Pro- Jonathan, anti-Buhari 2015
The Nation	Bola Tinubu	ACN/APC Leader	Anti-PDP, pro-opposition
Leadership	Sam Nda-Isaiah	PDP Presidential Aspirant 2015	Pro-North, lenient on PDP
Daily Trust	Mannir Dan-Ali et al.	Northern PDP network	Regional focus, Avoided PDP scandals
Channels TV	John Momoh	Ostensibly independent	Relatively balanced; dependent on adverts

Source: Compiled from Akinfeleye (2008); Ojebuyi & Salawu (2019); Adaja (2011).

Regulatory pressure is evident from NBC data (2016), which shows 68 fines and 7 shutdowns between 2010 and 2015, compared to 58 fines and 5 shutdowns from 1999 to 2007. In terms of advertising, both the Lagos (APC) and Rivers (PDP) governments withdrew advertisements from The Punch and Vanguard after negative coverage, resulting in an approximate annual loss of N200 million for each newspaper (Oso, 2012; IPC, 2015). The watchdog dilemma persisted, as Apuke and Omar (2020) examined 312 significant corruption reports from 1999 to 2015, with 234 appearing between 2007 and 2015, yet the conviction rate remained low at 7.7%. Although FOI laws and digital tools improved transparency, they did not translate into increased punishments. A broader analysis of trends from 1999 to 2015 reveals that ownership structures, regulation, and labor conditions are key factors. Partisan ownership concentration, driven by deregulation, led to what Hallin and Mancini (2004) term "political parallel media." By 2015, 11 out of 15 national newspapers had connections to governors, ministers, or party financiers. For instance, The Nation criticized the PDP, while AIT targeted the APC, yet neither consistently investigated their owners' allies. This resulted in a landscape characterized by "competing biases" rather than "competing truths."

NBC Regulation as Political Tool Between 1999 and 2015, the NBC issued 147 fines and 12 closures (NBC, 2016).

Table D: NBC Penalties on Broadcasters, 1999–2015

Administration	Fines (N)	Closures	Stated Reasons
Obasanjo 1999–2007	58	5	“Incitement,” “Unverified claims”
Yar’Adua 2007–2010	21	0	“Breach of code”
Jonathan 2010–2015	68	7	“False news,” “Hate speech,” “Documentary”
Total	**147**	**12**	**Political content = 81%**

Source: NBC Annual Reports, 2000–2016. The “national interest” provision acted as a flak mechanism described by Herman and Chomsky (1988).

Journalist Welfare and Professional Practice

NUJ (2015) estimated that 80% of reporters lacked health cover, pensions, or legal protection. Average pay was N45,000–N80,000 per month, compared with N29 million per month for federal lawmakers. Consequences included brown-envelope acceptance (74.2% in Pate & Dauda, 2015), self-censorship (82.6%), and frequent staff turnover. Thus, even where direct ownership pressure was absent, economic insecurity produced caution.

Synthesis: Nigeria’s media was legally libertarian but practically competitive-authoritarian. Liberalization multiplied channels, yet capture through ownership, advertising, and poor labour conditions meant pluralism did not deliver independence. The press could stop a Third Term agenda or amplify #OccupyNigeria, proving agenda power, but it could not ensure the prosecution of corrupt officials, revealing accountability limits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design. The design is appropriate because the paper seeks to critically examine, interpret, and explain the role of the mass media between 1999 and 2015 rather than test statistical hypotheses. Desk research is employed as the primary strategy, relying on critical evaluation of existing documents, policies, and scholarly works to establish patterns of media performance under PDP rule.

Sources of Data

The study relies entirely on secondary data. These include:

1. Legal and policy documents: 1999 Constitution, FOI Act 2011, NBC Code, and relevant National Assembly Acts.
2. Institutional data: NBC annual reports 2000 –2016, National Bureau of Statistics records, and Transparency International CPI reports.
3. Academic literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and seminar papers on media and democracy in Nigeria.
4. Media and NGO reports: Publications from Premium Times, The Punch, International Press Centre (IPC), Media Rights Agenda (MRA), and Freedom of Information Coalition.
5. Historical records: Front-page stories, editorials, and documented cases of corruption coverage from 1999–2015.

No primary data was collected through interviews or questionnaires due to the historical scope of the study and limitations of a seminar paper.

Method of Data Collection

Data were gathered through systematic library and online searches. Key databases used include Google Scholar, AJOL, ResearchGate, and institutional repositories of Nigerian universities. Search terms combined "Nigeria media," "PDP," "1999–2015," "FOI Act," "NBC sanctions," "agenda-setting," and "political economy." Relevant materials were downloaded, catalogued by theme, and cross-checked for authenticity. Government publications were accessed via official websites of the NBC, National Assembly, and Federal Ministry of Information.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis. First, documents were read to identify recurring themes: ownership, regulation, advertising, journalist welfare, agenda-setting, and watchdog outcomes. Second, quantitative indicators such as number of licenses, FOI compliance rates, and conviction percentages were extracted and presented in tables for clarity.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Growth in Private Broadcast Licensing, 1999–2007

Category	1999	2003	2007	Total % Increase
Private FM Radio	1	14	34	3300%
Private TV Stations	1	8	17	1600%
Community Radio	0	0	2	New
24-Hour News Channels	0	1	3	New

Source: Adapted from NBC (2016); Ojebode (2018

Discussion: Table 1 shows rapid liberalization under Obasanjo. However, as Political Economy theory predicts, ownership filtered this expansion. Raypower/AIT belonged to PDP's Raymond Dokpesi, while Daily Trust was tied to northern PDP networks (Akinfeleye, 2008). Thus, quantity increased, but independence was limited.

Table 2: Political Links of Major Media Houses, 2007–2015

Media Outlet	Owner/Key Figure	Political Tie	Coverage Tendency
AIT/ Raypower	Raymond Dokpesi	PDP BoT Member	Pro- Jonathan, anti-Buhari 2015
The Nation	Bola Tinubu	ACN/APC Leader	Anti-PDP, pro-opposition
Leadership	Sam Nda-Isaiah	PDP Presidential Aspirant 2015	Pro-North, lenient on PDP
Daily Trust	Mannir Dan-Ali et al.	Northern PDP network	Regional focus, Avoided PDP scandals
Channels TV	John Momoh	Ostensibly independent	Relatively balanced; dependent on adverts

Source: Compiled from Akinfeleye (2008); Ojebuyi & Salawu (2019); Adaja (2011)

Table 2 confirms Hallin & Mancini's (2004) "political parallel media" model. By 2015, 11 of 15 national dailies had links to political actors. This created "pluralism of bias" rather than watchdog pluralism, validating the Political Economy filters of ownership and advertising.

Presentation of Data on Agenda-Setting and Digital Shift

Table 3: Legal and Technological Milestones, 2007–2015

Year	Development	Impact on Media
2010	3m Nigerians on Facebook	Citizen journalism emerges
2011	FOI Act enacted	Legal backing for information requests
2012	#OccupyNigeria protests	Social media coordinated 5-city actions
2013	Premium Times established	Online-only FOI-driven investigations
2014	#BringBackOurGirls trends	Social media forces legacy media agenda
2015	Digital Switch Over pilot	Potential for 100+ TV channels

Source: Ihonvbere (2015); Ojebode (2018); FOI Coalition (2014)

Table 3 supports Agenda-Setting Theory. Digital platforms enabled citizens to set issues like fuel subsidy and Chibok girls, forcing traditional media to follow. The FOI Act also increased investigative stories by 40% between 2011–2014 compared to 2007–2010 (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2014). This shows the media fulfilled its "surveillance" and "mobilization" roles (McQuail, 2010).

Presentation of Data on Watchdog Role and Sanction Limits

Table 4: Corruption Exposure vs Conviction Rates, 1999–2015

Period	Major Corruption Stories	Published Cases	Resulting in Conviction Rate
1999–2007	78	6	7.7%
2007–2015	234	18	7.7%
Total	**312**	**24**	**7.7%**

Source: Saliu & Omotoso (2013); Apuke & Omar (2020)

Discussion: Despite increased exposure after the FOI Act, Table 4 shows sanction rates stagnated at 7.7%. This confirms the Social Responsibility gap: media exposed wrongdoing but complementary institutions courts, EFCC, legislature failed to act. Thus, press freedom met its "inform" obligation but not its "accountability" outcome.

Table5: NBC Regulatory Actions Against Broadcasters, 1999–2015

Administration	Fines Issued	Station	Closures	Cited Reasons
Obasanjo	1999–2007	58	5	"Incitement," "Unverified claims"
Yar'Adua	2007–2010	21	0	"Breach of code"
Jonatha	2010–2015	68	7	"False news," "Hate speech," "Documentary"
Total		**147**	**12**	**81% linked to political content**

Source: NBC Annual Reports, 2000–2016

Table 5 illustrates Herman and Chomsky's "flak" filter. 81% of sanctions targeted political content, showing regulation was used to discipline critical outlets. Combined with data that 60–70% of newspaper revenue came from government adverts (Oso, 2012), and 74% of journalists earned below N50,000 monthly (Pate & Dauda, 2015), the evidence explains why independence was constrained. Therefore, Nigeria 1999–2015 had the press freedom but de facto competitive authoritarian media. Legal freedom was necessary but insufficient for accountability.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the role of the mass media in Nigeria's democratic consolidation during the PDP's 16-year rule, 1999–2015. The objectives were to: analyze legal-institutional reforms; assess media performance in awareness and agenda-setting across five elections; evaluate the watchdog role and its limits; and investigate political economy constraints on independence.

The findings show four key patterns:

1. Legal and structural expansion occurred. The 1999 Constitution restored free expression, the NBC licensed over 140 private broadcast stations, and the 2011 FOI Act gave journalists a legal tool to demand records. Digital platforms after 2010 further widened public debate, with events like #OccupyNigeria and #BringBackOurGirls showing citizen-led agenda-setting.
2. Agenda-setting power was real. Media successfully placed issues like corruption, fuel subsidy, and the Third Term bid at the center of public discussion. In line with Agenda-Setting Theory, this influenced voter concerns and policy responses. The press helped stop the Third Term agenda and forced government reaction to protests.
3. Watchdog impact was limited. Although corruption reports rose 40% after the FOI Act, conviction rates remained at 7.7% between 1999–2015. Social Responsibility expectations were therefore only partly met: the media exposed wrongdoing but could not compel sanctions due to weak judiciary, legislature, and anti-graft bodies.
4. Capture persisted despite liberalization. Political Economy filters partisan ownership, government advertising dependence, NBC sanctions, and poor journalist welfare ensured that more media outlets did not mean more independence. By 2015, 11 of 15 national dailies had political ties, 81% of NBC penalties targeted political content, and 74% of reporters earned under N50,000 monthly. The result was a “liberalized but captured” media system.

Conclusion

The PDP era 1999–2015 tested the liberal assumption that press freedom automatically produces accountability. Nigeria gained procedural democratic traits: regular elections, no coups, and a larger, freer media space. However, substantive consolidation was weak. The media fulfilled its surveillance and mobilization functions but could not overcome structural capture to enforce accountability.

Using Voltmer’s (2013) “hybrid media” concept and Levitsky & Way’s (2010) “competitive authoritarian” model, this study concludes that Nigeria operated a de jure libertarian press within a de facto competitive-authoritarian framework. Legal freedom is necessary but not sufficient; without financial autonomy, professional security, and supportive institutions, media pluralism becomes “pluralism of bias” rather than a check on power.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Strengthen media economic independence

The National Assembly should amend the NBC Act to create a public media fund, financed by 1% of federal ad spend, to support investigative journalism grants.

Government advertising should be distributed through an independent agency using transparent, audience-based metrics to stop its use as political patronage.

2. Reform broadcast regulation

The "national interest" clause in the NBC Code should be defined narrowly and interpreted by the courts, not the executive, to reduce arbitrary fines.

NBC board appointments should require Senate confirmation and include civil society and NUJ nominees to limit executive control.

3. Enforce and expand the FOI Act

Sections of the Act allowing blanket exemptions for "national security" should be reviewed, with an independent FOI Commission empowered to compel disclosure and sanction non-compliant MDAs.

Annual compliance reports by all MDAs should be mandatory and published.

4. Improve journalist welfare and professionalism

The NUJ and Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria should agree on a minimum wage for journalists tied to legislator pay scales, with health insurance and legal protection as standard.

Media houses should adopt public ethics codes and disclose ownership and political interests in every edition or broadcast.

5. Build institutional synergy for accountability

Anti-graft agencies, the judiciary, and legislature must act on media revelations. A joint EFCC-Media-NGO task force could track exposed cases to conviction, publishing quarterly status reports.

Civil society should use FOI requests and digital tools to sustain pressure after a scandal break, closing the "exposure without sanction" gap.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to literature by showing that Nigeria's 1999–2015 period fits a "liberalized but captured" model. It updates Hallin & Mancini's political parallelism thesis with Nigerian data and demonstrates that digital media and FOI laws expand agenda-setting but do not automatically fix accountability where political economy constraints persist. The findings caution against equating media quantity with democratic quality in transitional states.

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