



Working Paper No. 218

# **The dangerous watchdog: How corruption shapes support for media scrutiny in Africa**

by Nnaemeka Ohamadike | December 2025

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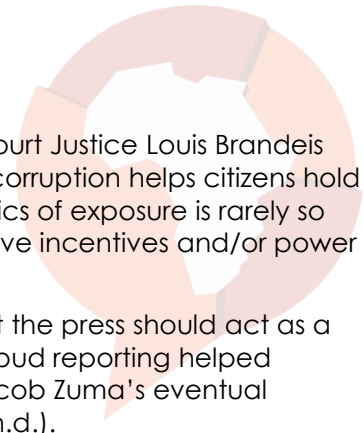
## Abstract

This study examines how corruption influences Africans' attitudes toward media scrutiny of government wrongdoing, addressing a gap in existing research that has largely concentrated on institutions and media content. Using Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) data from 39 countries and mixed-effects binary logistic regressions, the analysis shows a dual pattern. At the country level, weaker corruption control is linked to greater concern that reporting government wrongdoing harms the country, suggesting that citizens in corrupt settings may buy into narratives that delegitimise critical journalism. At the individual level, however, respondents who perceive corruption as widespread are less likely to see investigative reporting as harmful, indicating that personal awareness of corruption may strengthen support for media scrutiny. These findings suggest that corruption undermines accountability not only by constraining the press but also by shaping how citizens evaluate the legitimacy and necessity of watchdog journalism.

**Keywords:** media coverage, corruption, accountability, governance, democracy, public attitudes, Africa, Afrobarometer

## Acknowledgement

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## Introduction

"Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants," U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously said, referring to the belief that vigorous reporting on corruption helps citizens hold their leaders accountable and punish wrongdoers. Yet the politics of exposure is rarely so simple, especially where corruption is entrenched, and rulers have incentives and/or power to manage what the public sees.

South Africa offers a textbook example supporting the view that the press should act as a watchdog: Years of media investigations and independent ombud reporting helped publicise state-capture abuses and contributed to President Jacob Zuma's eventual resignation in 2018 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.).

However, when sunlight burns, exposure can feel perilous rather than purifying. Across the continent, many citizens view the negative reporting of government wrongdoing as harmful rather than beneficial to their country. One possible explanation for this is that when corruption is high, governments may take more stringent measures to suppress reporting that might be embarrassing to them, such as framing critical journalism as divisive, unpatriotic, and a threat to the public good (Teplyashina & Golubev, 2019). Citizens may internalise these cues, expressing concern about the harm of reporting on corruption or political failure.

This possibility motivates this paper's central hypothesis that where corruption is high, citizens are more likely to view reporting on government mistakes and corruption as harmful to the country. Put differently, corruption may shape not only the supply of news (through censorship or self-censorship) but also the demand for scrutiny – public support for watchdog journalism itself.

Accordingly, the paper addresses two core questions: (1) What do Africans think about media involvement in investigating and reporting government wrongdoing? (2) How is corruption related to citizens' views on media reporting of government wrongdoing? I test the hypothesis and address the questions by conducting a multilevel logistic regression analysis based on Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) data from 39 African countries. The aim is to bring citizens' attitudes into a discussion that often focuses on institutions, newsroom practices, and content framing (Stapenhurst, 2000; Solis & Antenangeli, 2017; Fadaïro, Fadaïro, & Aminu, 2014; Quayle & West, 2025).

The results show that most Africans want the press to investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption. However, the relationship between corruption and support for media scrutiny is nuanced. At the country level, citizens in countries with weaker corruption control are more likely to say that reporting on government wrongdoing harms the country. If corruption can erode support for investigative reporting, it weakens an important accountability mechanism precisely where it is most needed. However, a very different outcome emerges when we examine perceptions of corruption at the individual level: Those who perceive corruption as widespread are more likely to support media reporting on the issue, indicating that they are less likely to share concerns about potential detrimental effects of media exposure of corruption on the country's image.

## Corruption and news coverage

Governance literature emphasises that a free and independent press is indispensable for democratic accountability (Patnaik & Chauhan, 2024; Supekova, Stehlikova, & Keklak, 2025). Stapenhurst (2000) argues that the media can strengthen governance by uncovering wrongdoing, informing citizens, and supporting oversight institutions such as parliaments and anti-corruption agencies. But these dividends emerge only under enabling conditions: robust freedom-of-expression frameworks, legal protection for journalists, and strict adherence to professional journalistic norms (Namonje & Ndhlovu, 2025). Where corruption becomes entrenched, these safeguards weaken, leaving media institutions vulnerable to capture, intimidation, or censorship (Stapenhurst, 2000).

Corruption tends to be lower in societies with freer and more independent media and higher in countries where media freedom is restricted, and oversight is weak (Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Chowdhury, 2004; Kalenborn & Lessmann, 2013). Solis and Antenangeli (2017) demonstrate that as executive-level corruption rises, incumbents face greater expected losses from exposure and thus deploy constraining mechanisms, including direct repression, legal harassment, regulatory capture, and the cultivation of self-censorship, to manage informational threats.

Fadairo et al. (2014) show that elite pressure can operate via subtle editorial practices that preserve the appearance of corruption coverage while diminishing its political salience. Their study of Nigerian dailies finds that while corruption in politics and governance receives extensive coverage, such stories are often buried on inside pages and framed as neutral news items. This sustains visibility without urgency, allowing the press to appear active while avoiding confrontation with power.

In the African context broadly, press autonomy remains fragile, constrained by state capture, political interference, and weak institutional safeguards. While many African countries formally guarantee press freedom, constraints such as political patronage, ownership concentration, jailing of journalists, and Internet shutdowns continue to limit journalistic independence (Ali, 2015; Nkomo & Wafula, 2016; Conroy-Krutz, 2020; Kurgat, 2025). In Uganda, journalists operate in a media landscape that is formally free but tightly constrained, leading them to self-censor and balance watchdog and advocacy roles to avoid confronting political elites (Sobel & McIntyre, 2020; Mwesige, 2004). In several other African countries, governments have invoked concerns about hate speech and misinformation to justify restrictions on the media (Conroy-Krutz, 2025). These challenges are unfolding against a backdrop of declining public confidence in media freedom (Conroy-Krutz, 2020).

These elite-driven constraints on media freedom can shape the environment in which citizens evaluate the press's democratic role. When governments are corrupt and thus have an incentive to restrict coverage or foster self-censorship, citizens may internalise official narratives framing critical journalism as threatening or harmful (Teplyashina & Golubev, 2019). Conversely, in contexts with less corruption and more responsive institutions, citizens may observe that media scrutiny produces tangible and beneficial results, reinforcing support for watchdog journalism. Thus, corruption can shape public attitudes toward media scrutiny not merely through censorship but also by altering the institutional conditions and informational climate that citizens use to judge whether investigative reporting serves or harms their country.

Most existing studies focus on how corruption affects media institutions, newsroom practices, and content framing, providing little evidence on how it shapes public demand for media scrutiny. This study addresses this gap by examining how corruption influences Africans' views of the media's role in reporting government mistakes and corruption.

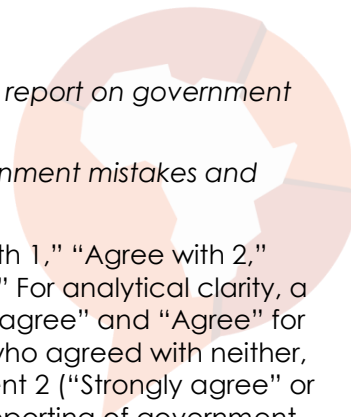
## Methodology

### *Data*

This study draws on multiple data sources, primarily the Afrobarometer Round 9 survey conducted across 39 African countries between October 2021 and July 2023. The survey uses probability designs with nationally representative samples of adult citizens ranging from 1,200 to 2,400 respondents (Afrobarometer, n.d.). Additional data were sourced from the World Bank's (2023a; 2023b) World Development Indicators and Worldwide Governance Indicators, as well as the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (2024) data set.

### *Dependent variable*

Afrobarometer surveys include a range of questions designed to capture citizens' attitudes toward key sociopolitical and economic issues across Africa. One question of relevance to this study asked 54,436 respondents to indicate which statement best reflected their view:



*Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.*

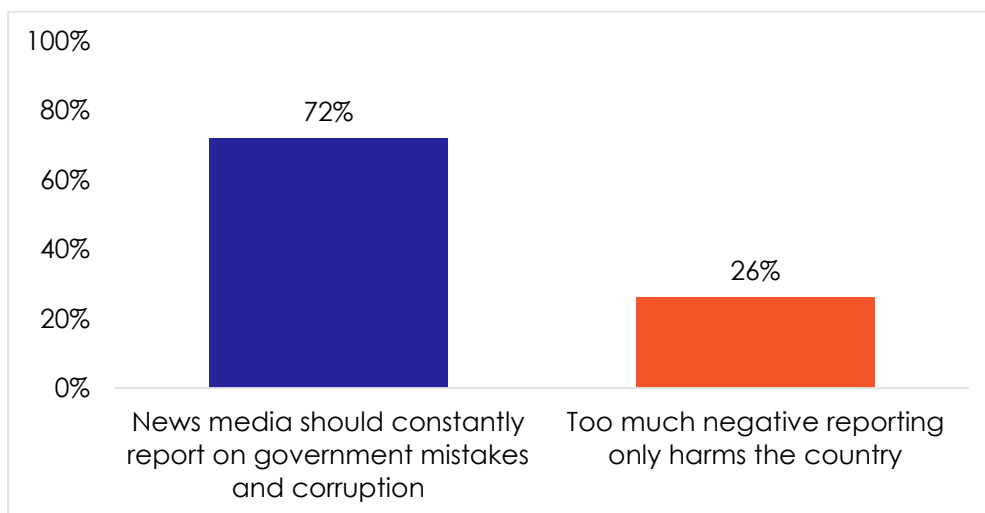
*Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.*

Respondents had six options: “Strongly agree with 1,” “Agree with 1,” “Agree with 2,” “Strongly agree with 2,” “Agree with neither,” and “Don’t know.” For analytical clarity, a dichotomous variable was constructed by combining “Strongly agree” and “Agree” for each statement and excluding the remaining 2% of responses who agreed with neither, didn’t know, or refused to answer. Responses favouring Statement 2 (“Strongly agree” or “Agree”) were coded as 1, indicating concern that excessive reporting of government wrongdoing harms the country, while those favouring Statement 1 were coded as 0, reflecting support for continuous media scrutiny of government actions. Ohamadike and Orakwe (2024) observe that dichotomising such variables enhances interpretability by distilling complex response patterns into a clear “agree-disagree” framework, particularly when responses within categories show strong internal consistency.

Regarding the first research question on whether Africans support a watchdog role for the media, Figure 1 shows that 72% of respondents want the media to constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption, while 26% think that too much such reporting only harms their countries.

This divergence stems from various factors. Some Africans may view news media scrutiny as essential for transparency and accountability in government; thus, they support it as a key aspect of a thriving democracy. Conversely, others may buy into official narratives portraying “negative reporting” as harmful or destabilising. People who are pro-incumbent may also be less likely to perceive problems such as corruption and more inclined to distrust or dismiss media that might embarrass the regime by exposing wrongdoing.

**Figure 1: Support media’s watchdog role? | 39 African countries | Afrobarometer | 2021/2023**

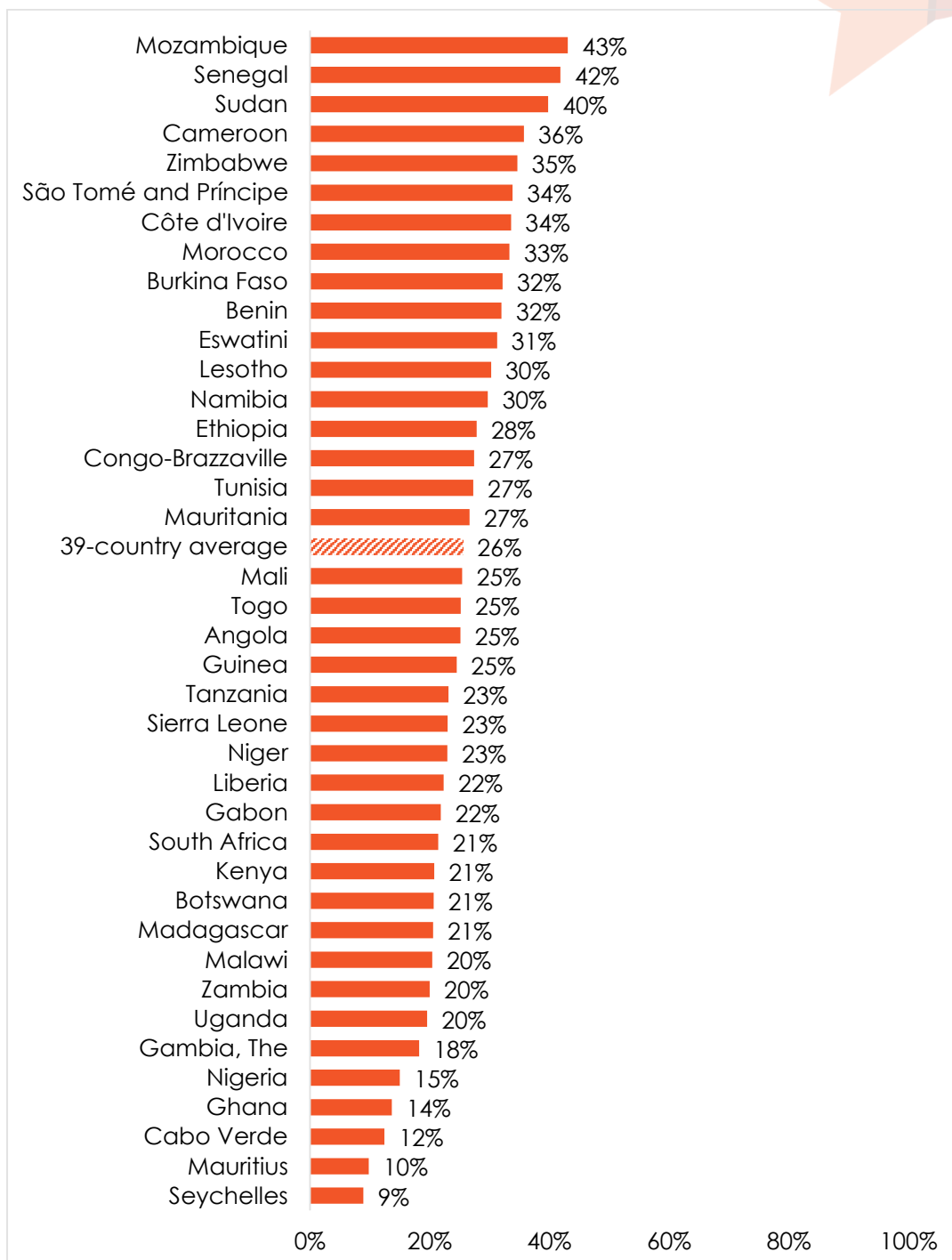


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
*Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.*  
*Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.*  
 (Figure shows % who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

Figure 2 presents the share of citizens in each of the 39 surveyed countries who believe that too much reporting on government mistakes and corruption harms the country. The results show wide variation across contexts, with concern about excessive reporting highest in

Mozambique (43%), Senegal (42%), and Sudan (40%) and lowest in Cabo Verde (12%), Mauritius (10%), and Seychelles (9%). These results reveal that public perceptions of the media's role in exposing wrongdoing are not uniform and may depend on specific country contexts.

**Figure 2: Too much negative reporting harms the country** | 39 African countries | Afrobarometer | 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.  
 Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.  
 (Figure shows % who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 2)

### *Independent variables*

The country-level independent variable, the World Bank's (2023a) Control of Corruption indicator, is used to measure perceived corruption levels. This indicator "captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as 'capture' of the state by elites and private interests" (World Bank, n.d., p. 1). It is measured on a scale from -2.5 to 2.5, where higher indicates better corruption control.

The individual-level independent variable is a corruption perception index constructed using Afrobarometer Round 9 data, where higher values indicate stronger perceptions that corruption is widespread. It is based on responses to the questions:

*How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president and officials in his office? Members of Parliament? Civil servants? Local government councillors? Police? Judges and magistrates? Tax officials?*

Response options were "None," "Some of them," "Most of them," "All of them," "Refused," and "Don't know." "Refused" and "Don't know" responses are excluded from our analysis.

Importantly, there is some overlap between the country-level and individual-level independent variables, as the World Bank's Control of Corruption measure incorporates Afrobarometer's corruption questions about the Presidency, the judiciary, and the bureaucracy. However, as a country-level governance indicator, it draws on a much wider set of sources, including the Economist Intelligence Unit, Varieties of Democracy, Freedom House, the World Economic Forum, and several business-risk surveys (see World Bank, n.d.).

### *Individual-level control variables*

The individual-level control variables are sourced from Afrobarometer's Round 9 survey.

Concern about the harm of negative reporting is likely influenced by people's lived experiences of poverty. To account for this, I employ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) (Mattes, 2020). This index is constructed using five Afrobarometer Round 9 questions:

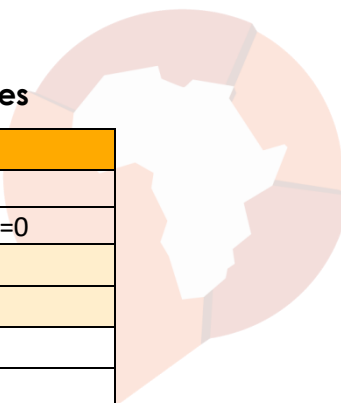
*Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?*

Responses include "Never," "Just once or twice," "Several times," "Many times," "Always," and "Don't know" (Mattes, 2020). Since the LPI provides a direct, experiential measure of economic hardship, I exclude gross domestic product per capita (a country-level indicator of economic prosperity commonly used in the literature) as a control.

Demographic controls for age, education (ranging from 0 to 9, representing levels from no formal schooling to post-graduate education), gender, and urban vs. rural location are included, as they are commonly used in similar governance studies (Isbell, 2023; Ohamadike & Orakwe, 2024; Ohamadike & Morrison, 2025). I also control for partisanship/government support through citizens' trust in their ruling party: Individuals who are critical of the government may be more likely to perceive corruption in government and support media coverage of it. Since trust in the ruling party may itself be impacted by support for the media's watchdog role, which could introduce post-treatment bias, the regression models were re-estimated without this variable. The results did not change substantially.

All individual-level control variables except lived poverty and educational attainment are coded as binary indicators (0 or 1) (Table 1).

Table 2 shows considerable variation across countries, with values ranging from highly stable democracies like Botswana and Seychelles to fragile states like Mali and Sudan, while individual-level variables such as gender, rural residence, and youth status show relatively balanced distributions.

**Table 1: Coding scheme for individual-level control variables**

Variable name	Coding categories
Age	Youth (aged 35 years and below)=1
	Non-youth (aged 36 years and above)=0
Gender	Female=1
	Male=0
Location	Rural=1
	Urban/Semi-urban=0
Trust the ruling party	Distrust the ruling party=1
	Trust the ruling party=0

**Table 2: Summary statistics for each variable | 39 African countries<sup>1</sup>**

Statistic	Mean	St. dev.	Min.	Pctl.(25)	Median	Pctl.(75)	Max.
Negative reporting concerns	0.3	0.4	0	0	0	1	1
Corruption perception index (Afrobarometer)	1.4	0.7	0.0	1.0	1.3	1.9	3.0
Rural	0.5	0.5	0	0	1	1	1
Lived Poverty Index	1.4	0.9	0.0	0.6	1.4	2.0	4.0
Female	0.5	0.5	0	0	1	1	1
Distrust the ruling party	0.3	0.5	0	0	0	1	1
Educational attainment	3.6	2.3	0	2	4	5	9
Youth	0.5	0.5	0	0	1	1	1
Control of Corruption (World Bank)	-0.5	0.6	-1.4 (Sudan)	-0.9	-0.6	-0.3	1.7 (Seychelles)
Liberal democracy	0.3	0.2	0.1 (Sudan)	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.7 (Seychelles)
Population	33,653,860	42,680,636.0	119,878 (Seychelles)	5,302,681	22,593,590	47,249,585	218,541,212 (Nigeria)
Political stability	-0.5	0.8	-2.5 (Mali)	-0.9	-0.5	-0.1	1.1 (Botswana)

### Country-level control variables

Population growth data were sourced from the World Bank (2023b). Population growth was included because it can strain state capacity and institutional performance, often creating conditions that foster corruption and weaken governance effectiveness (Simmons, 1977; Gallup, Sachs, & Mellinger, 1999; Ezeh, Bongaarts, & Mberu, 2012; Amin & Soh, 2019). As governments struggle to meet growing socioeconomic demands, public frustration may increase, leading citizens to call for stronger oversight and media accountability. At the same time, leaders facing demographic pressures may become more sensitive to negative coverage, perceiving it as politically destabilising.

To capture the level of democratic governance, I used the Liberal Democracy Index from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem, 2024). This control accounts for regime-type variation, as

<sup>1</sup> The re-coded versions of the individual-level variables are presented here. This excludes “Don’t know,” “Refused,” and “Missing” values.

autocratic systems in Africa tend to perform worse on governance than democratic ones, often exhibiting higher corruption and greater sensitivity to critical media coverage (Alence, 2023).

I also included the Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism indicator from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank, 2023a) to control for how differences in political stability may influence corruption and public support for media scrutiny.

Finally, to assess potential multicollinearity among predictors, I conducted both a variance inflation factor (VIF) test and a correlation analysis. The VIF values were well below conventional thresholds, indicating no serious multicollinearity concerns. The correlation results, presented in the Appendix, further confirm that the variables are sufficiently independent for inclusion in the regression models.

### *Method of data analysis*

All analyses were performed using R statistical software, Version 4.5.0. Given the hierarchical structure of the data and the binary dependent variable, multilevel logistic regression was applied to assess the influence of corruption on attitudes toward media scrutiny. Multilevel (or mixed-effects) models are appropriate for nested data structures, where observations within the same group (in this case, respondents within countries) may share unobserved characteristics yet remain independent from observations in other groups (Nganje, 2022).

This approach accounts for country-specific factors that may shape the relationship between corruption and media attitudes, allowing for the examination of relationships both within and between countries (Fox & Weisberg, 2019; Nganje, 2022). The mixed-effects model includes fixed effects, which estimate average relationships across all respondents, and random effects, which capture variation in these relationships across countries (Nganje, 2022; Ohamadike & Orakwe, 2024). Statistical significance was evaluated at the 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

To conclude this section, potential endogeneity in the modelling process is acknowledged. In contexts where citizens are already distrustful of the media for reasons unrelated to corruption, they may demand less accountability, thereby enabling corruption to persist. In such cases, the direction of causality may be reversed, such that lower media trust suppresses accountability and in turn allows corruption to flourish, rather than corruption alone shaping attitudes toward media scrutiny.

## **Results**

### *Concern about harm of negative reporting*

Across both models in Table 3, using the World Bank's Control of Corruption measure, the results indicate that weaker control of corruption is associated with greater concern that too much reporting of negative events, such as government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country. In the binary logit model (M1), control of corruption is negative and statistically significant, implying about a 9% decrease in the odds of endorsing "negative reporting harms the country" for each one-unit increase in corruption control. In the mixed-effects model (M2), the coefficient remains negative but loses significance, indicating that the results weaken once country-level heterogeneity is accounted for.

Country-level controls point in the same direction in the pooled model and then generally lose precision in M2. In M1, larger population, greater political stability, and higher liberal democracy are all associated with lower concern about negative reporting. None of these remains statistically significant in M2.

To ensure that the random-intercept specification does not obscure significant effects for country-level predictors, I re-estimated the models using bootstrapped standard errors for the country-level coefficients and applied the Mundlak (1978) correction, which adds country-level means of individual predictors. Bootstrapping did not materially change the results, and in the Mundlak model, all mean individual-level predictors except for *Female* lost

significance, along with the existing country-level variables. This likely captures limited statistical power for country-level effects with only 39 countries – random intercepts account for unmeasured country-level heterogeneity, which can inflate standard errors for country-level predictors when they are correlated with this variation. Individual-level variables remain significant because they draw on within-country variation across thousands of respondents.

For individual-level controls, rural, female, and young respondents are more likely to view negative reporting as harmful, but youth loses significance in the mixed-effects model. By contrast, distrusting the ruling party is strongly and negatively associated with negative reporting concerns, consistent with the idea that individuals critical of government may be less inclined to accept narratives that critical coverage harms the country. Educational attainment shows a significant negative association in both models, indicating less concern about the harm of negative reporting as education levels rise. Lived poverty is small and not significant in M1, but becomes negative and significant in M2, suggesting that, within countries, those experiencing greater deprivation are less likely to see watchdog reporting as harmful.

**Table 3: Negative reporting concerns and Control of Corruption (World Bank)**

	Dependent variable: Negative reporting concerns	
	Binary logit (M1)	Mixed effects (M2)
Control of Corruption (World Bank)	-0.098*** (0.027)	-0.175 (0.158)
Rural	0.087*** (0.022)	0.107*** (0.023)
Lived Poverty Index	-0.018 (0.012)	-0.040*** (0.012)
Female	0.131*** (0.021)	0.138*** (0.021)
Distrust the ruling party	-0.354*** (0.023)	-0.342*** (0.025)
Educational attainment	-0.047*** (0.005)	-0.053*** (0.005)
Youth	0.053** (0.021)	0.025 (0.021)
Population (log)	-0.078*** (0.010)	-0.043 (0.059)
Political stability	-0.114*** (0.021)	-0.064 (0.124)
Liberal democracy	-0.536*** (0.095)	-0.583 (0.564)
Constant	0.434*** (0.150)	-0.082 (0.879)
Observations	51,992	51,992
Log likelihood	-29,144.750	-28,542.340
Akaike inf. crit.	58,311.500	57,108.680
Bayesian inf. crit.		57,214.980

Note: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 4 replicates Table 3 models but replaces the World Bank country-level Control of Corruption measure with an individual-level corruption perception index from Afrobarometer. The relationship here reverses, as respondents who perceive more corruption are less likely to say that reporting on government wrongdoing harms the country. This negative association is statistically significant in both models.

This suggests a distinction between contextual and compositional effects. At the country level, weak corruption control may coincide with official narratives that stigmatise critical journalism. Governments in corrupt settings tend to suppress or discourage reporting that could expose wrongdoing, often portraying investigative coverage as destabilising, unpatriotic, or harmful to national unity, and many people may buy into this. At the individual level, those who are personally aware of corruption appear more supportive of scrutiny (i.e. less worried about harm). They recognise corruption, not its exposure, as the real threat, and investigative journalism as a remedy. In short, regimes with poor corruption control can cultivate climates that weaken demand for media scrutiny, even as citizens most attuned to corruption demand more (not less) investigative reporting.

**Table 4: Negative reporting concerns and corruption perception index (Afrobarometer)**

	Dependent variable: Negative reporting concerns	
	Binary logit (M1)	Mixed effects (M2)
Corruption perception index (Afrobarometer)	-0.201*** (0.016)	-0.197*** (0.017)
Rural	0.074*** (0.022)	0.095*** (0.023)
Lived Poverty Index	0.008 (0.012)	-0.024* (0.013)
Female	0.126*** (0.021)	0.131*** (0.021)
Distrust the ruling party	-0.281*** (0.024)	-0.280*** (0.025)
Educational attainment	-0.039*** (0.005)	-0.049*** (0.006)
Youth	0.058*** (0.021)	0.028 (0.022)
Population (log)	-0.066*** (0.009)	-0.019 (0.056)
Political stability	-0.132*** (0.021)	-0.089 (0.126)
Liberal democracy	-0.721*** (0.081)	-0.936** (0.471)
Constant	0.538*** (0.151)	-0.061 (0.876)
Observations	50,934	50,934
Log likelihood	-28,450.870	-27,869.960
Akaike inf. crit.	56,923.750	55,763.930
Bayesian inf. crit.		55,869.990

Note: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

Overall, the results are mixed. At the country level, citizens in corrupt settings may internalise narratives that stigmatise critical journalism, while in countries with stronger corruption control, people appear less concerned that investigative reporting harms the country. At the individual level, however, respondents who perceive more corruption are less likely to view investigative reporting as harmful, suggesting that personal awareness of corruption may foster a greater appreciation for the media's watchdog role. This implies that while corrupt regimes can create climates that weaken demand for watchdog journalism, individual awareness of corruption may instead strengthen support for scrutiny.

## Conclusion

This paper asked two questions: (1) What do Africans think about media involvement in reporting government wrongdoing? (2) How does corruption shape citizens' views on media reporting of government wrongdoing? The study tests the hypothesis that corruption increases concerns that too much such reporting harms the country. In doing so, the study fills a key gap in the literature by shifting attention from how corruption affects institutions and media content to how it shapes citizens' attitudes toward watchdog journalism.

The analysis used data from Afrobarometer Round 9, supplemented with indicators from the World Bank's World Development Indicators and Worldwide Governance Indicators and the Varieties of Democracy data set. Analysis employed mixed-effects binary logistic regression.

The results show that most Africans want the news media to investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption. However, at the country level, weaker corruption control is associated with greater public concern that such reporting harms the country. This suggests that when corruption is higher, governments may suppress or discourage reporting that might embarrass them, often by framing critical coverage as detrimental to national interests, a narrative that many citizens may come to accept.

However, the results change when using the individual-level Afrobarometer corruption perception measure. Individuals who perceive higher levels of corruption in government are less likely to view reporting on government wrongdoing as harmful. In other words, those who recognise corruption as widespread appear to reject narratives that portray critical coverage as damaging. Their responses suggest a recognition that corruption itself (not its exposure) is the real threat, and that the media's role in uncovering it is necessary.

The results of the control variables show that rural residence, being female, and younger age correlate with greater concern about negative reporting; higher education and distrust of the ruling party correlate with lower concern. Larger population, greater political stability, and higher liberal democracy are also associated with lower concern, but only in the pooled logit model. Lived poverty is negatively associated with concern within countries.

In practice, these findings show that corruption's impact is twofold: At the country level, it weakens media independence and public demand for scrutiny through government narratives that frame critical journalism as harmful or destabilising, while at the individual level, citizens who perceive corruption as widespread are more likely to support investigative reporting as a necessary corrective. Strengthening media freedom in Africa, therefore, requires both institutional reforms (such as access-to-information laws, legal safeguards for journalists, and credible oversight mechanisms) and public communication strategies that counteract anti-media narratives and reinforce the idea that exposing wrongdoing serves, rather than threatens, the public good.



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Appendix



Figure A.1: Correlation of all variables used in the analysis

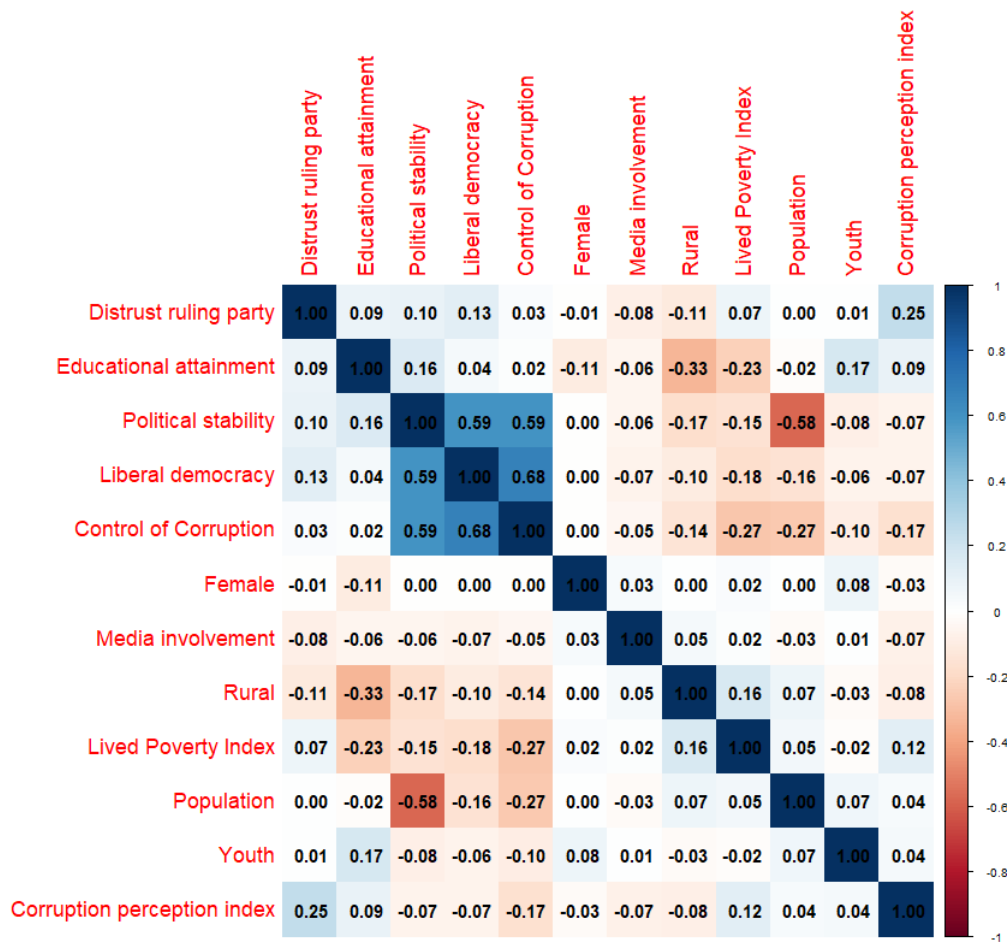


Figure A.1 presents the correlation matrix of all variables used in the analysis, showing no evidence of multicollinearity among the model predictors.

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