

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: MODUS OPERANDI, CAUSES EFFECTS AND CONTROL

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Abstract

This study takes a closer look at how corruption impacts Nigeria's economy. The motivation comes from the widespread belief that corruption does not just hurt the economy. It undermines nearly every aspect of society. While corruption has existed across civilizations for centuries, serious academic attention to its effects only began in the last twenty years. It takes many forms and produces a wide range of consequences, both economic and social. The roots of corruption often lie in the political and economic climate, weak professional ethics, declining moral standards and even cultural traditions and demographic factors. Its economic effects are well documented, though far from fully understood. Corruption slows growth, disrupts business operations, discourages investment and weakens employment opportunities. It also drains tax revenue, misdirects public spending and reduces the effectiveness of financial aid programs. Beyond the economy, corruption erodes trust in institutions, weakens respect for the rule of law, and diminished the quality of education, healthcare and infrastructure; ultimately lowering people's standard of living. Tackling corruption is complex, with no universal solution. What works in one country may fail in another. This research seeks to shed light on the causes of corruption, its far-reaching consequences and possible strategies for addressing it in Nigeria's unique context.

Keyword: Foreign Investments, Transparency, Corruption, Remuneration, economic growth, political will, whistle blowing.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are several reasons behind this situation. To begin with, it is now widely accepted that corruption is not confined to any one place; it is a global issue. It cuts across developed and developing nations, and it shows up in government institutions, private businesses and even non-profit or charitable organisations. In Nigeria, however, corruption has seeped deeply into the social fabric. It is no longer seen as an exception but almost as part of the system itself. Those who engage in corrupt practices are often celebrated rather than condemned, receiving recognition and respect from their communities, political leaders, and even religious bodies.

The volume of wealth one exhibits determines to a large extent on how the person is recognized or respected regardless of the source of the income/whether or not the individual has integrity at all. In fact, in some quarters, your level of corruption determines your level of popularity and recognition with chieftaincy titles.

In governance, it has become manifest in the three arms as well as several of its organs to the extent that separation of powers which is the bedrock of democracy has remained an illusion since the Parliamentary and Judicial arms have become mere appendages of the executive arm where controls the national cake and the extent of their loyalty/allegiance determines how much they will get individually from the national coffers and do give a damn as to whether or not the

essence of their being elected is accomplished or not. It stems from the way out political parties are formed and ran, the process of rising to power, the way and manner in which subsequent elections/appointments are made hinders economic growth by misallocating resources, discouraging investment, and undermining public trust, leading to inefficiencies, reduced productivity, and a weaker economy overall.

Corruption has become one of the most troubling realities in many developing nations, and Nigeria stands out as a prime example. As noted by Nigeria-plant.com (2006), the country has wrestled with this challenge for decades, and its effects have been deeply damaging. Corruption shows up in countless ways, which include; bribery, nepotism, graft, extortion, money laundering, fraud and other dishonest practices that have gradually been normalized within society. This widespread acceptance is often linked to a collapse in moral values, the absence of strong role models, weak legal and enforcement systems, and unchecked greed. Together, these factors have allowed corruption to thrive, shaping lifestyles and behaviours that undermine progress and weaken the nation's foundations.

Virtually every field of endeavour have compromised on this beginning from the law enforcement agencies who act as foot soldiers and render returns to their superiors who in turn protect them from external influences, the religious setting who believe that financial prosperity is the only proof of blessings from God, the communities who honour only son and daughters who have made money regardless of whether the source is legitimate or not.

Political office holders and even their appointees have several means through which they siphon money; apart from issues of contract inflation, abandonment, offering of sub standard work, retention of ghost workers, appointment of unqualified persons into very sensitive positions and even the deliberate extensions of tenures of "preferred person" whose terms of office have expired and the parochial appointment of persons from a particular geographical zone, ethnic or religious group.

Global media outlets thrive on stories of misconduct, especially when powerful figures are involved. Scandals are treated as headline material, pursued with relentless investigation and intense coverage. While corruption is recognized as a worldwide problem, Nigeria has often found itself singled out in these narratives. For some, this constant spotlight feels like unfair targeting; for others, it simply reflects the reality of how deeply corruption has taken root in the country since 1999.

Corruption stands as one of the greatest barriers to a nation's progress. It hinders economic growth and blocks efforts to modernize, cutting across every sphere of life, which include; economic, social, political, cultural and even legal. Its reach is wide, and its impact is felt in every coner of society, making it a formidable challenge to overcome. Clearly stated, the level of corruption or lack of it determines how far a society can go in comparison with other with similar characteristics within a given time frame.

Several "effort" have been made at different times to curb the effects of corruption on the nation, but that has yielded very little effort majorly because it has functioned like the barber's chair which keeps moving in circles to without making any progress as it has been used as either a political tool or an instrument for witchhunt. The agencies have equally been unnecessarily duplicated as though that was the problem, yet nothing has changed. Unfortunately too, supposed thieves have been caught and items ceased from them got restolen

by the same persons who caught the thieves, this leaves every right thinking person in astonishment and others end up receiving only media trails (involving staggering amounts of money) while they have private settlement that eventually ends the matter without convictions and the amount for such settlements end up in private pockets while the state and her law abiding citizens continue to suffer.

Instead of fulfilling their legal mandate to combat corruption, Nigeria's antigraft agencies have often been steered off course by those in power. Rather than serving as instruments of justice, these bodies are frequently manipulated to target political opponents and protect the interest of their principals, ultimately becoming tools for maintaining control rather than dismantling corruption. They achieve this through selective investigation and prosecution of suspects, abrupt stoppage of investigation and the prosecution process when the suspect agrees to their demands which obviously is not in tandem with the establishing legislation. They even capitalized on this to do more of media trail than follow the process of the law in prosecuting the suspects; after the initial drama, next is a suspected reconciliation from the back door and the matter subsequently since the ruling party assumed the Country's leadership, your sins will be forgiven and it will be assumed that the crime for which he or she is facing prosecution was never committed. No wonder the then party chairman of All Progressive Alliance (AP) Adams Oshiomole (2015) stated to every body's chagrin, that anyone who defects to the ruling APC will have his/her sins forgiven. The position was vigorously adopted without any form of objection from any quarter as it was a mere statement of fact.

On the promise to fight corruption, governments have come with different mantras including; "War against indiscipline", "Eight Point Agenda", "Change", "Renewed Hope" e.t.c. Only a coordinated non-partisan move that sanitizes right from the top without sacred cows, or untouchables, that recognizes the principles of equity, justice, fairness and openness can address the dangers of corruption in Nigeria and other nations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theories of Corruption

Several theories attempt to explain corruption, including principal agent theory, national choice theory, institutional theory, and the modernization theory, each focusing on different aspects of why and how corruption occurs. Here's a breakdown of some key theories of corruption:

Principal-Agent Theory:

This theory, also known as agency theory, posits that corruption arises when public officials (agents) with discretion over public services lack accountability to their superiors (principals) and act in their own self-interest, often for personal gain. Example: A public official uses their position to demand bribes or favours for personal gain, instead of acting in the public's best interest.

Rational Choice Theory:

This theory suggests that individuals, including public officials, engage in corruption because they rationally calculate that the potential benefits (e.g., financial gain) outweigh the risks (e.g., getting caught). Example: A business owner bribes a public official to secure a lucrative contract, believing the bribe is worth the cost compared to the potential profits.

Institutional Theory:

This theory emphasizes the role of weak or corrupt institutions in fostering corruption, suggesting that corruption is more likely to occur in systems with poor governance, weak rule of law, and lack of transparency. Example: A country with a weak judiciary and a lack of transparency in governance contract is more prone to corruption compared to a country with strong institutions and a transparent system.

Modernization Theory:

This theory, particularly relevant in the context of developing countries, argues that corruption can be a byproduct of rapid modernization and the transition to market economies, where traditional norms and values may be challenged. Example: in a developing country undergoing rapid economic growth, corruption may arise as individuals seek to exploit opportunities for personal gain in a system that is not yet fully institutionalized.

Rent=Seeking Theory:

This theory suggest that individuals and groups engage in rent seeking behaviour, where they use their political connections or influence to extract economic rents (unearned income) from society, often through corrupt means. Example: a business owner uses their political connections to secure a government contract with inflated prices, thereby extracting rents from the public.

Social Exchange Theory:

This theory focuses on the social relationships and networks that can facilitate corruption, where individuals engage in corrupt practices un exchange for favours or benefits within a social context. Examples: A public official engages in corruption to maintain a relationship with a powerful business owner, who in turn provides favour or benefits to the officials

Collective Action Theory:

This theory emphasizes that corruption is not just an individual phenomenon but a collective one, where individuals may engage in corruption because they believe that others are also doing so, or because they feel that they have no other choice. Example: A group of public officials may engage in corruption because they believe that it is the norm in their organisation or because they fear being left behind if they do not participate. This work is centred around the collective Action theory.

2.2 Conceptual Framewprk

2.2.1 Meaning

Corruption can be understood as any action that benefits those in positions of authority while harming others, making it essentially an abuse of power. This takes shape when individuals exploit their influence to sway decisions or engage in dishonest practices such as bribery, accepting inappropriate gifts, secret deals, election manipulation, fund diversion, money laundering or investor fraud (Chen, 2023). At its core, corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain. Public official may exploit their offices for private benefits, undermining democracy and weakening the rule of law. Likewise, private individual can abuse

their positions to distort fair competition and disrupt the proper functioning of markets. In both cases, corruption erodes trust, damages institutions, and obstructs progress.

Some scholars describe corruption as the private capture of state resources and there are arguments that this dynamic has ironically helped hold Nigeria together. In a country marked by deep ethnic and religious divisions, elites from different groups often clash but ultimately strike compromises through corrupt arrangements. This uneasy balance has prevented another civil war like that of 1967-70, yet it has left ordinary citizens trapped in poverty.

Abuse of power can be carried out by individuals or entire institutions; whether governments, businesses, or other organisations. It takes many forms; bribery, favouritism, extortion, nepotism, ethnic or religious bias and fraudulent dealings with investors. Often, corruption flourishes in environments where government interference distorts the economy. Without strong checks and balances, even subtle signals; like the expectation of a bribe before a task is completed; can entrench bureaucracy and slow progress.

2.2.2 Tactics and Techniques of Corruption

Corruption reveals itself countless forms, ranging from bribery and falsifying records to defrauding investors, extortion, and secret double-deals. It can involve kickbacks, favouritism, nepotism, or outright diversion of public funds. Other manifestations include bigotry, inflated contracts, over invoicing and the deliberate manipulation of official documents.

It also extends to offenses carried out through the postal system, obstructing investigations, submitting false statements or offering gratification through intermediaries. Practices such as embezzlement, budget padding and political graft; where money meant for public projects is deliberately redirected to serve private interest; are further examples. Beyond these, corruption often overlaps with crimes like money laundering and drug trafficking, making it a pervasive threat to both government and society.

2.2.3 Types of Corruption

Corruption is often grouped into distinct categories, each reflecting its scale of the context in which it occurs. Analysts commonly distinguish between supply and demand corruption, where one party offers and another accepts; grand and petty corruption, which separates large scale abuses of power from everyday misconduct; conventional and unconventional corruption, based on whether the practice follows familiar patterns or takes unusual forms; and public versus private corruption, depending on whether it occurs within government institution or private organisations.

2.2.3.1 a) Classification According to Field Include:

Political Corruption

Corruption takes many shapes and is often categorized in different ways. Analyst distinguish between supply and demand corruption, where one party offers and another accepts; grand and petty, which separates large-scale abuses from everyday misconduct; conventional and unconventional corruption, based on whether the practice follows familiar patterns or unusual schemes; and public versus private corruption, depending on whether it occurs in government or private institutions corruption can therefore be classified either by the field of activity or by the scale of its impact.

Electoral Corruption

Election related corruption is widespread and includes practices such as vote buying, promise of political appointments or favour, intimidation, coercion and even violence. In Nigeria, this often manifests in manipulated results; where candidates who lose are declared winners, or votes appear in places where none were cast. Corruption in office also extends to the sale of legislative votes, judicial rulings, administrative decisions, and government appointments.

Legislative Corruption

Within the legislature, corruption goes beyond kickbacks and quid pro quo arrangements. It includes budget padding, misuse of oversight functions and the pursuit of excessive salaries and allowances that many Nigerians view as corrupt in spirit, even if technically legal. Legislators frequently insert constituency projects into the national budget, often duplicating efforts or creating unnecessary agencies. These agencies then serve political patrons, who expects contracts and appointments to be distributed among their supporters.

Petroleum Corruption

The oil sector remains the epicentre of corruption in Nigeria. The Nigerian National Petroleum (NNPC), once a corporation, wields enormous influence over industry policy and regulation, often spending lavishly with little accountability. Since petroleum revenues are the backbone of Nigeria's economy, corruption in this sector has devastating consequences. From the allocation of oil wells to crude loading operations and the management of joint venture agreements, mismanagement and diversion of funds have consistently undermined transparency and crippled economic growth.

Trade Related Corruption

Trade corruption include giving approvals for sub-standard products while kicking out the product with quality, NAFDAC, SON, Ministry of Trade and Commerce and other regulatory agencies have abandoned their primary duties pursuing personal gains. The Nigerian Customs and other agencies at the borders all concentrate on ways to enrich themselves rather than concentrate on delivering on the reason for them being there. All these misNorma's make ease of doing business in Nigeria a mirage and it scare foreign investors. Miscalculated protectionist trade policies and double taxation have equally contributed immensely in creating trade barriers not to talk about the tactical creation of monopolies for the likes of Aliko Danote. All these have led to racketeering and creation of black markets in virtually all industries.

Industrial Corruption

Nigeria's industrial base has been in decline since the 1970s, weakened by poor infrastructure, foreign exchange shortages, erratic fiscal policies and entrenched corruption. Governments at both federal and state levels continue to prop up failing state owned enterprises, using them as vehicles for patronage and siphoning public funds. The country is littered with "white elephant" projects; lavish but unproductive ventures that drain resources. The most notorious of these is the Ajaokuta Steel Mill in Kogi State, a decades long project that has consumed billions without delivering meaningful results.

Agricultural Corruption

Agriculture, which contributes nearly 30% of Nigeria's GDP and employs the largest share of its workforce, suffers heavily from corruption. Land tenure laws give officials the power to grant or revoke occupancy rights, discouraging farmers from investing in their land. Subsidies meant to support smallholders are often diverted to elites, family members or shell companies. A striking example is dominion Farms' failed attempt to establish a large scale rice project in Taraba State. Despite promises of government backing, the project collapsed under the weight of corruption and political disputes, depriving thousands of potential jobs in one of Nigeria's poorest regions.

Infrastructural Corruption

Billions have been spent on roads, railways, ports, schools, hospitals and power projects, yet corruption has derailed much of this investment. Inflated contracts, kickbacks and mismanagement plague infrastructure development. The Niger Delta highway project, described as "designed to fail," remains incomplete after a decade and billions of dollars. Similarly, Port Harcourt's \$400 million monorail project was abandoned as wasteful. Beyond wasted funds, corruption in construction has deadly consequences: contractor often use substandard materials and bribe inspectors, leading to catastrophic building collapses such as the church disasters in Lagos (2014) AND Akwa Ibom (2016).

Power Sector Corruption

Nigeria's power sector is a textbook case of grand corruption. Between 1999 and 2017, an estimated ₦11 trillion (\$64.7 billion) was lost to graft. Despite massive investments, electricity generation remains pitiful; around 4,500 megawatts for nearly 200 million people, comparable to Oman's output for just 4.5 million. The 2013 privatization of the sector failed to curb corruption, as many of the new operators were politically connected elites with histories of mismanagement.

Financial Sector Corruption

The banking industry has long been a facilitator of corruption. Mismanagement and fraudulent practices contributed to the 2009 banking crisis, when several major banks collapsed under bad debt. The government was forced to bail them out with ₦620 billion (\$4.2 billion), underscoring how deeply corruption had destabilized the financial system.

Environmental Corruption

Environmental programs, meant to address Nigeria's ecological challenges, have become lucrative channels for embezzlement. Audits of the ecological fund revealed billions siphoned off by politicians, civil servants and contractors. Meanwhile, corrupt officials enable destructive practices like illegal logging, gas flaring and deforestation, worsening the impacts of climate change. In Taraba State, for instance, corruption has allowed loggers to devastate Gashaka-Gumti National Park, Nigeria's largest and most biodiverse forest reserve.

Defense Sector Corruption

Nigeria's defense and security institutions are widely regarded as among the most compromised in the world. Transparency International has highlighted how decades of unchecked graft have weakened the military, leaving it unable to effectively confront Boko Haram or manage communal conflicts. The scale of theft is staggering; between late 2014 and

early 2015, for instance, former national security adviser Sambo Dasuki allegedly diverted \$2 billion meant for security operations. Such corruption has had deadly consequences: soldiers have been sent into battle with outdated weapons and inadequate supplies, contributing to heavy losses. Even after ₦1 billion was earmarked under Buhari's administration for new armaments, frontline troops claimed no equipment ever reached them.

Police Corruption

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), with over 270,000 officers, suffers from endemic corruption. Officers are poorly paid, often predatory, and most visible at roadside checkpoints where they solicit bribes. Surveys show they are the most bribed officials in the country. Corruption has hollowed out the force, leaving it unable to address internal security challenges. In 2018, the accountant general revealed over 80,000 ghost workers; more than 20% of the force; on the payroll. With the police weakened, the army has taken on domestic policing roles for which it is wrongly suited. The rot was exposed in 2013 when journalist broadcast the appalling conditions at Nigeria's premier police training college.

Judicial Corruption

Nigeria's judiciary, like its police, is plagued by corruption. Judges, magistrates, lawyers, and court staff; often underpaid and overworked; are vulnerable to bribery. Corruption manifests subtly: cases dismissed on technicalities, evidence excluded, or proceedings deliberately delayed. This undermines agencies like the EFCC, as wealthy. In 2016, security operatives seized \$800,000 in a rare crackdown on judges, including a supreme Court justice, accused of fraud and money laundering.

Anticorruption Agencies Compromised

Ironically, Nigeria's leading anticorruption bodies; the EFCC, ICPC and Code of Conduct Bureau; have themselves faced corruption allegations. Successive governments have weaponized these agencies against political opponents while shielding allies. Critics argue Buhari's administration was not different, applying "perfume" to corruption within government while using "insecticide" against rivals. Between 2007 and 2011, Attorney General Michael Aondoakaa and EFCC chair Farida Waziri were accused of undermining anticorruption efforts, prompting the U.S. to suspend support. Even EFCC leaders from Nuhu Ribadu to Abdulrasheed Bawa and the current chair Olanipekun Olukayode have faced accusations of complicity; raising the troubling question of who watches the watchdogs.

Educational Corruption

Education, seen by Nigerians as the key to progress, has been crippled by corruption. Funds meant for schools are embezzled, while students are extorted for admissions or grades. Universities such as Ibadan and Nsukka have been hollowed out by mismanagement. Agencies like JAMB, TETFund, and UBEC have all been embroiled in scandals. Practices such as illegal levies, "sex-for-scores," and favouritism in appointments have become disturbingly common. Low budget allocations, delayed releases of funds, and patronage; driven contracts further weaken the sector, eroding the quality of education nationwide.

Health Sector Corruption

Nigeria's healthcare system, much like its education sector, has been crippled by mismanagement, underfunding, and entrenched corruption. With annual spending at only about \$217 per person; and much of that siphoned away; the true investment in public health is far lower. Senior officials and administrators frequently embezzle funds or inflate contracts for clinics and equipment, which often end up abandoned after ceremonial launches. A striking case involved the head of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), who was dismissed after misusing ₦919 million in training funds and awarding contracts to his brother's firm. Such practices have fueled the circulation of substandard drug and medical products, contributing to countless preventable deaths.

Humanitarian Sector Corruption

Corruption within Nigeria's humanitarian agencies has worsened the crisis created by Boko Haram, which displaced over two million people. Agencies like NEMA and state level SEMAs, often led by political loyalists rather than professionals, have diverted relief funds and supplies meant for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In 2017, EFCC arrested the head of Gombe SEMA, Danlami Rukuje, for allegedly selling aid materials intended for IDPs. This misuses of humanitarian resources highlights how graft and favouritism undermine public welfare, replacing service with self interest.

Types of Corruption by Scale

Petty Corruption

Small scale corruption that occurs at the point of service delivery, such as bribes in registration offices, police stations, offices, police stations, licensing boards, schools, or even religious institutions.

Grand Corruption

Large scale corruption at the highest levels of government, involving systemic manipulation of political, legal and economic structures. It thrives in environments with weak oversight or authoritarian tendencies.

Systemic Corruption

Endemic corruption rooted in institutional weaknesses. Unlike isolated misconduct, this form is embedded in the very processes and structures of governance, making it harder to eradicate.

2.3 Cause of Corruption

Nigeria's first against corruption has been undermined by a deep undermined by a deep absence of values such as integrity, honesty, patriotism, accountability and moral courage; both within government and among its anti-graft agencies (Ribadu, 2010). Instead of being condemned, corrupt individuals often find themselves celebrated, rewarded, and elevated in society. The disturbing reality is that the more entrenched one becomes in corrupt practices, the more recognition and admiration they tend to receive.

Lack of a Living Wage

The minimum pay package for salary earner is so meagre that it cannot sustain even the most innocent and frugal of persons, this forces people to engage in one form of corruption or the other regardless of their level from the security man to the office clerk and to those higher in the echelon of administration.

Moral Decline

Morality represents the shared standards that guide human behaviour, with society traditionally punishing those who deviate from these norms (Joda, 2010). Today, however, moral values have eroded across nearly every sphere from politics to religion. The decline is so severe that younger generations, especially Gen Z, are left disoriented and uncertain about what principles to follow.

Greed

Greed is the relentless pursuit of wealth, status and influence, driven by an excessive desire for material gain. In Nigeria, this obsession, particularly among politicians and bureaucrats; has fuelled the spread of corruption (Joda, 2010). Former EFCC chairperson Waziri once described this compulsive accumulation of riches as a psychological disorder, where individuals hoard far more money than they or their descendants could ever need.

Get Rich Quick Mentality

The get rich quick idea, originally used in the early 1900s to describe dubious investment scheme, has taken on a darker meaning in Nigeria. Among many youths, it now reflects a willingness to abandon legitimate work in favour of illegal activities. Armed robbery, political thuggery, kidnapping, internet fraud (“Yahoo and Yahoo Plus”), and ritual practices have become common shortcuts to wealth (Agbo, 2019). This mindset undermines social stability and perpetuates cycles of crime and corruption.

Judicial Independence and Corruption Control

One of the most powerful tools for curbing corruption is a judiciary that operates independently and without interference. When courts are subject to manipulation; particularly by the executive arm of government; public trust collapses. In Nigeria today, justice is often perceived as a commodity, sold to the highest bidder rather than delivered impartially. Endless adjournments are another tactic used to stall cases, especially when outcomes appear unfavourable to those in power. As a result, the courts have lost their reputation as the “last hope of the common man.”

Fear of Poverty

The World Bank (2017) defines poverty as hunger, homelessness, illness without access to medical care, joblessness, and living day by day without secure. It also means exclusion from meaningful participation in society. This fear of deprivation drive many individuals to steal from government coffers or organizations entrusted with funds. Poverty is widespread in Nigeria, with over 90 million people living below the poverty line; surviving on less than \$1.90 per day. Such desperation fuels corruption, as people seek survival through dishonest means.

Foreign Collaboration in Corruption

Corruption in Nigeria is not sustained by domestic actors alone; foreign governments and corporations play a role by accepting stolen funds into their banking systems. While these institutions often claim to uphold transparency, they have historically turned a blind eye to illicit deposits. A notorious example is the billions looted by former Nigerian head of state Sani Abacha, much of which was hidden in European banks. Despite knowing the money was stolen, these institutions allowed it to remain, enabling corruption to thrive across borders (Iroan, 2006).

Government Intervention in the Economy is a Root Cause of Corruption

This has been abused severally and used as a ploy to grant Monopolies to certain individuals or groups thereby giving them undue advantage over their competitors. This was so glaring during the multiple exchange rate regime, where the bulk of Foreign Exchange available was given to one organisation while others are left themselves out.

Lack of Accountability in Public Offices

The collapse of accountability marked a turning point in Nigeria's political life. One transparency was abandoned, politics transformed into the most profitable enterprise, attracting individuals willing to sacrifice ethics for power. Corruption became the fuel of ambition, with leaders prepared to manipulate, deceive and exploit simply to gain office or cling to it. In this environment, the pursuit of power is inseparable from corruption, and the system rewards those who pay the game most ruthlessly.

2.4 Measurement of Corruption

Transparency international, the global watchdog on corruption, has consistently placed Nigeria among the world's most corrupt nations, which a reputation that has severely hindered the country's progress across all sectors (Ribadu, 2003).

Nigeria's Corruption Index

On the 2024 corruption perception index, Nigeria scored 26 out of 100, reflecting widespread public concern about graft. Historically, the country's performance has been poor: between 1996 and 2024, Nigeria average score stood at 21.64 points, with its best showing in 2016 at 28 points and its worst in 1996 at just 6.9 points. These findings highlight how deeply corruption has been entrenched, undermining governance, economic growth and public trust.

2.5 Consequences of Corruption

Corruption produces wide ranging effects that cut across the economic, social, political, security and financial spheres of life. Its most devastating impact falls on those already struggling, as it restricts access to essential services such as education, healthcare and justice. Vulnerable citizens are often singled out for bribe demands, knowing they are less likely to report abuses. When corruption is exposed, it can generate damaging publicity, erode trust in institutions, and tarnish reputations. On a broader scale, it weakens democracy, slows economic growth, distorts laws and regulations, and creates unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles that discourage investment. Ultimately, corruption undermines the very foundations of governance, leaving societies poorer, less stable and deeply divided.

Economic Impacts

Decreased Investment Reduced Economic Growth:

Corruption distorts market forces, leading to inefficient resource allocation and hindering overall economic growth. This includes manipulations even in securities market with no consequences on the perpetrators thereby eroding confidence and stifling investment. There is diversion of public funds towards unproductive or even illegal activities, rather than being used for infrastructural development and essential services. It creates unfavourable environment for both domestic and foreign investment, as businesses are hesitant to invest in a country where they face high risk of theft, extortion, including a judicial system that is compromised and executive that does not obey court orders.

Increased Cost for Businesses

Corruption can act as an “inefficient tax” on businesses, increasing their operating costs and reducing their profitability. This happens by creating bureaucracies and unnecessary bottlenecks in granting approvals some of which are only fast tracked when money exchange hands

Weakened Institutions

Corruption undermines confidence in public institutions and weakens respect for the rule of law. As trust erodes, governance becomes unpredictable, creating instability that discourages investment and makes the business environment far less secure and reliable. We have strong individuals and their followers rather than strong institutions. This increases the followership of the individual regardless of him/her being a no achiever, sometimes the system is skewed as all who opposed the bad leader it often exacerbates social and economic inequalities by allowing a small elite to benefit at the expense of the majority

Brain Drain Reduced Productivity and Increased Inequality

Corruption can lead to the emigration of skilled workers and professionals, further weakening the economy. Corruption weakens the delivery of essential services and undermines infrastructure development. Overtime, this erosion results in poorly maintained road, unreliable utilities, and declining public institutions, leaving citizens with lower quality healthcare, education and social support systems. Those who are employed via notes from the powers that be are first misfits in the work place and cannot settle down to do the job, thereby lowering the general productivity.

Loss of Revenue

Corruption drains vital public resources; stripping governments of the revenue they need to provide essential service and invest in development. Funds that should strengthen infrastructure, healthcare, and education are diverted into private pockets, leaving the nation poorer and less capable of meeting its obligations. They are mostly diverted into private pockets rather than the government accounts.

Social Impacts

Erosion of Public Trust

Corruption weakens the bond between citizens and the state, stripping government institutions of credibility. As confidence fades, people grow cynical and disillusioned, convinced that

public systems serve only the powerful rather than the common good. Misfits are usually put at the helm of decision making it uncomfortable for those with opposing views to co-exist with them using the slogan if you cannot beat them, join them.

Increased Poverty and Inequality

Corruption strips societies of resources that should improve lives, leaving citizens with deteriorating living standards. It deepens poverty and widens inequality, as wealth is siphoned into private hands while the majority struggles without access to basic needs or opportunities. A case in hand is Nigeria which has been declared the poverty capital of the world not minding that she is a nation blessed with abundant human and natural resources.

Weakened Social Fabric

This affects the citizens not just at home but also in the diaspora as they are treated less honourably than others knowing fully that they have lost out at the home front

Poor Service Delivery

Corruption can lead to poor quality of public services in all facets including revenue collection agents/agencies who eventually collect revenues and put in their pockets. This includes the cases on concessions where the person(s) approving the concessioning are the major beneficiaries.

Increased Crime

Corruption can create an environment where crime thrives, as criminals are able to operate with impunity, and no one queries their activities because they are an extension of the people in the law enforcement agencies. However, that will lead to further crimes as the people will eventually devise a way of defending themselves which sometimes lead to reprisal attacks.

Effects on Security

Poor internal security because of the effects of bribery; this affects the recruitment, remuneration, equipping and retirement of security personnel has taken a new dimension as a result of corruption, this equally affect their delivery in their duty posts. Many take to bribery, extortion while others are involved in illegal jobs as well as hiring of their arms to criminals.

Compromise in equipping of the law enforcement Agencies

This manifests in recruiting more of people from a particular region, sending more of those from another to the battle zone, ignoring offences committed by those from a certain region, so does it happen in training, promotion, appointments and retirements. Benefits meant for security agencies are diverted by cartels for their own use.

Bending of the rules when money changes hands

This a corollary from the submission made above where biases are shown in several aspects of the security architecture. Some offences committed by security forces from different regions are given different interpretations.

Security who are exposed to hunger and starvation resort to crime to solve their problems and the circle continues.

It may lead to chaos, general breakdown of law and order and even anarchy; resulting in coup de etats and counter coups not forgetting the attendant bloodshed and the destruction of property.

Political Effects

Political Impasses

Corruption crease impasses in the political situation, it starts with of accountability couples with greed and affects the way political parties are formed, funded and managed to the way appointments are made and the culture of winner takes all and loser loses all and corruption that goes on with impunity. This creates leadership vacuum because the best candidates are usually not chosen, only charlatans who are ready to offer money and make other forms of compromise to ascent to the position, yet they cannot lead. This often results in leadership crisis.

Leadership Insensitivity

Because the positions are bought and already paid for in advance, they owe no allegiance to the people and this is consequent upon the fact that they do not even depend on the peoples vote to emerge winners in the subsequent elections.

Lack of Separation of Powers

From experience, the leader of the executive who is the head of the government becomes the owner of the state or nation, he calls the shots and decides who comes and who goes, many times it requires an art of God for them to leave the office. Leaders and members of the other arms of government becomes stooges for him to the point of turning themselves into bag carriers for the President or Prime Minister.

Lack of Accountability

This is the greatest danger and the fastest killer in a corrupt system, calling someone who has held a public office is own regarded as a declaration of war and has become common practice at all levels of public practice. Because this ugly trend, people are ready to do anything to ascend to the throne, knowing that as they are bent on perpetuating themselves forever one they mount the saddle even against constitutional provisions.

Leadership Failure

The combination of the above fall outs of corruption culminates into leadership failures which is already glaring. The elected leaders turns the electorates into their slaves and lives in influence without recourse to the plight of the masses who have been plunged into abject poverty by the actions/inactions of the elected/self appointed leaders. The rich gets richer while the poor gets poorer is more evident in a corrupt system than anywhere else, equity and equality all disappear into the thin air. The public treasury becomes personal estate of the leaders, families, friends, associates and cronies and the rest of the populace is left to rot in abject poverty and they do not care whose ox is gourd.

3.0 Efforts at Tackling Corruption Nigeria

Legislations

Akpa (2018) highlights a wide range of Nigerian laws and institutions established combat corruption, including the failed Back Acts of 1991 and 1994, the Advance Fee Fraud Act of 1995, the ICPC Act of 2000, the Money Laundering Amendment Act of 2003, the Money Laundering Prohibition Act of 2004, as well as oversight bodies such as the Code of Conduct Bureau, the Due Process and Financial Intelligence Unit, the Supervisory department of the Central Bank of Nigeria, the National Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2007.

Collectively, these frameworks suggest that Nigeria possesses a robust legal and institutional arsenal capable of tackling corruption. Yet, in practice, corruption continues to thrive, undermining governance and stalling national development, proving that the existence of laws alone is insufficient without genuine enforcement and political will.

The Establishment of Anti-Graft Agencies Such as:

Nigeria has established a broad network of institutions tasked with preventing corruption, ranging from the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), and the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI).

Oversight also extends to the office of the Auditor General of the Federation, the Public Complaints Commission, and the Technical Unit on Governance and Anti-Corruption Reform (TUGAR). Together, these agencies form a framework designed to safeguard accountability, regulate financial practices and promote transparency across government and public institutions.

Advocacy, Information and Awareness

Curbing corruption requires strengthening ethical business standards, embedding mandatory training such as anti money laundering education, and ensuring that accountability mechanisms are rigorously enforced so that transparency becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Prosecution of Culprits and the Placing of Bounties

Not so much has been done in this direction, the antigraft agencies are involved more in media trials and sometime very bogus charges against the suspect which sometimes runs from tens to hundreds, as the case progresses, they begin to reduce the charges.

4.0 Conclusion

After reviewing both theoretical perspectives and empirical studies, several conclusions emerge. Corruption in Nigeria is widely perceived as deeply entrenched, particularly within the public sector, where practices such as the erosion of values, the obsession with quick wealth, and the absence of accountability serve as its driving forces. The impact is far-reaching: corruption is not only a moral and social crisis but also a direct obstacle to economic progress, undermining growth and development. Its influence cuts across political, legal, and social

structures, leaving no sphere untouched and reinforcing the view that corruption remain one of the greatest threats to Nigeria's advancement.

Corruption siphons away critical government income, shrinking public revenues and depriving the state of resources needed to fund infrastructure, social programs and depriving the state of resources needed to fund infrastructure, social programs, and essential services. Allocation of recourses and productivity. It equally discourages people from investing in the economy especially Foreign Direct Investment. Corruption could be effectively controlled if the government as well as the people show seriousness in doing so.

5.0 Recommendations

Transparency is essentially about clarity; knowing who is involved, why decisions are made, what actions are taken, how processes unfold and the resources committed. It shines a light on both formal structures and informal practices, ensuring that power is exercised openly and responsibly. By making information accessible, understandable and usable, transparency empowers citizens to hold leaders accountable, strengthens trust in institutions, and acts as safeguard against corruption. It must be embedded at every stage of governance, from appointments and elections to outcomes and reports, so that public confidence rests not on secrecy but on openness and accountability.

Having political will to fight corruption as different from having it as a mantra and doing almost nothing about it; Political leaders need to first shun corruption themselves and then have the moral backing to fight it as a course, it has to be done with the full weight of political power.

The reinforcement of business best practices, stressing integrity, honesty, hard work in the form of mandatory anti-corruption advocacy should be done using every medium of communication (domiciled in all major dialects) including spelling the consequences of corruption to the society and this should be matched with action to act as a deterrent to others.

The law should be supreme applying to all citizens in the same manner, there be quick and timely dispensing of cases especially those bothering on corruption. This will be a clear message to the judiciary also corrupt/criminally minded persons should be made to pay a price by being denied employment in certain places as is applicable in Belgium and the England and this should be without recourse to the person's ethnicity, religion or other affiliations.

Existing Legislations should be reviewed and fortified, freedom of speech should equally be encouraged including the use of whistle blowing strategies and every report should be verified and the identity of the blowing securely preserved.

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