

Corruption and national development: A study of Nigeria (2015-2023)

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ABSTRACT: Corruption is often recognized as a global issue, yet its intensity varies significantly across different regions. A major challenge confronting many developing nations, including Nigeria, is the pervasive nature of corruption, which substantially hinders progress. In Nigeria, this issue has become so ingrained that it permeates the very structure of society. Previous governments, both civilian and military, have attempted to implement measures to combat this problem. Currently, various institutions have been established specifically to eliminate corruption. However, the issue persists, largely because those leading the fight against corruption are frequently implicated in it themselves. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effects of corruption on Nigeria's national development. Theoretically, the study adopted the Prebendal theory. The study, being qualitative in nature, exclusively relied on secondary data sources such as academic journals, newspaper articles, and government statistics from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Transparency International, historical records like government reports and official documents as well as internet sources. This study establishes that the most devastating challenge that has threatened economic growth and sustainable development in Nigeria is corruption. This realism explains the fact that since 1999 after twenty-four years into civilian rule, massive corruption, absence of political openness, transparency, accountability, electoral rigging, god-fatherism etc holds sway in the polity, coupled with huge incidences of poverty, inequality, unemployment and poor social infrastructure. This study posits that corruption severely obstructs national development by negatively influencing essential sectors such as education, health, electricity, transportation, and infrastructure. It recognizes that the repercussions of corruption encompass various issues, including sluggish economic growth, inadequate infrastructure progress, inefficient utilization of human and natural resources, distorted policy frameworks, ineffective policy implementation, significant public fund misappropriation, and reduced Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The paper ultimately concludes that, despite its global prevalence, corruption is fundamentally detrimental to development in all respects. It advocates for a reassessment of existing legal structures and emphasizes the need for reform and strengthening of anti-corruption bodies like the police, judiciary, EFCC, ICPC, and SERVICOM to minimize administrative conflicts, enhance cost-effectiveness, ensure independence from executive control, and promote optimal operational efficiency.

Keywords: Challenges, corruption, development, national development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption poses a significant challenge to governance and development on a global scale, impacting nearly every nation. Mazi Mbah and Ojukwu (2019) highlight that many Third World countries grapple with a lack of resources, skilled labour, and slow economic growth, compounded by

high levels of corruption and illiteracy. These nations often experience extreme poverty, nepotism, and inadequate institutional frameworks. Today, it is universally acknowledged that corruption has profound repercussions for economic stability and national progress.

Public concern regarding corruption in Nigeria has deep historical roots. One of the earliest notable cases involved Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who served as the Premier of the Eastern Nigerian government from 1954 to 1959. He exploited his influential position to misappropriate government funds for his personal bank, the African Continental Bank. This led to an investigation by the Foster Sutton Tribunal of Enquiry in 1956, resulting in the forfeiture of all bank assets to the regional government. Similar instances of corruption were observed in both the Western and Northern regions of Nigeria. Additionally, the collapse of the First Republic has been linked to corruption, as highlighted by the coup leader Kaduna Nzeogwu in his address on the day of the coup, as noted by Nwabuzor (2005):

Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent, those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look like big for nothing before the international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds.

From its mild manifestation in the 60s, corruption grew rapidly at an alarming rate during the Second Republic (Aiyede 2006). For instance, Bangura (1986, p.31) aptly described Shagari administration (1979-83) as “the government of the contractors by the contractors and for the contractors”. At the end of the Second Republic, the probe panel set up by the General Buhari military administration found many government officials and state governors guilty of diversion, mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds. Several millions of naira were siphoned out of the country, several millions squandered and several others unaccounted for. Federal Government White papers of the report of Justices Sampson Uwaifo and Mohammed Bello Review Panels (1986) are eloquent testimonies.

Compounded during the several years of military misrule, corruption became “institutionalized and assaulted every facet of the country’s political and socio-economic life” (Aiyede 2006, p.37). It is so pervading and ravenous to the extent that it became the major explanation for all military coups and authoritarian takeovers in the country. Paradoxically, many of the supposedly corrective regimes became entangled in and epitomized corruption, the same reason for which they took over power. Stupendous wastage of human and material resources became the order of the day. During the Babangida autocratic regime for instance, corruption was raised to the level of state policy and allegation of corrupt practices were treated with utmost levity destroying

all the achievement of the previous administration. Corrupt politicians that were jailed by his predecessor- General Muhammadu Buhari - had their cases reviewed. Some were released and some had their sentences reduced. During this period, corruption became an instrument of regime legitimization and stability. Gboyega (1996, p.5) has this to say:

The benign treatment of corruption in the early years of the Babangida administration foretold a much more conscious instrumental use of corruption to ensure regime stability. For a military administration, Babangida’s government was unique in its unconcern about corruption within its rank and among public servants generally; it was as if the Government existed so that corruption might thrive. Some of the worst offenders who were found guilty and were serving various jail terms were released from prison on the guise of Babangida’s human right posture.

Furthermore, all the ill-gotten wealth and properties earlier confiscated were returned to the corrupt politicians (Gboyega, 1996, p.11). This was done under the Forfeiture of Assets (Release of certain Forfeited Properties, etc) Decrees No 24 and 50 of 1993. To sustain and boost the regime’s legitimacy, Babangida made even more extensive pay-offs to various groups of people and organizations in the civil society. These includes: Ecumenical Cathedral Abuja, 50 million naira; Obafemi Awolowo Foundation, 30 million naira; Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria, 20 million naira; Zik Hall Zungeru, 40 million naira; Arewa House Kaduna, 35 million naira; Yakubu Gowon, Centre, 30 million naira; Nigerian Union of Journalists National Secretariat Abuja, 30 million naira; Nigeria Labour Congress Secretariat Building Fund, 50 million naira among several others (Committee for Defence of Human Rights, 1992, p.35).

Other cases of corruption and crass state profligacy under Babangida’s administration was reported in The News Magazine of December 20, 1993 which includes mismanagement of \$2 billion Gulf oil windfall in 1991; 400 million naira wasted on the Better Life Project, \$200 million siphoned from the Aluminum Project and other colossal corruption at all level of government too numerous to mention. Such was the level of corruption and state profligacy under Babangida autocratic rule that Achebe’s (1960, p.29) trenchant description of the Nigerian state became more relevant and forceful in 1993 than it was in 1960. According to him, “In Nigeria the government is ‘they’. It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble”. By 1993, it had become clear to the public that Babangida’s loyalists were being enriched at their peril and consequently, the government had ceased to enjoy the stamp of public

validation. If there was any support left for Babangida at this period, it was because of his promise to hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1993, and when his government annulled the June 12 presidential election, his government contracted and collapsed.

The Abacha regime was the most illegitimate, reckless and ruinous regime Nigeria ever had in its political history. Though he vowed to fight corruption by constituting Failed Bank Tribunal and inaugurated War against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), Abacha was an icon of corruption. After his demise in office the revelations were staggering. In Abuja alone, the army general was asked to forfeit six ultra-modern buildings worth millions of naira. In addition, his family was asked to return \$625,263,187.19 and over 75 million British Pounds and another 100 million naira illegally acquired to the state. This is not inclusive of 250 million naira and a total of 96.9 million naira forfeited to the Nigerian state by his sons- Mohammed Sani Abacha and Abdulkadir Abacha respectively. Until his death in the Presidential Villa in Abuja, Abacha nursed and promoted corrupt practices to hold on to power. Pay offs and undue reward to the regime loyalist became the order of the day. Among those who enjoyed the General Abacha's wanton generosity, unmeritorious gift and prodigality included Chief Anthony Ani to the tune of DM 30 million and US \$3 million; Alhaji Bashir Dalhatu US \$5 million gift from late General Sani Abacha held in a London Account and Alhaji Abdulazeez Arisekola Alao 100 million naira gift from Abacha (FGN, 1999, Decree 53). The list is frightening.

Abdul Salam Abubakar who took over after the death of Abacha and who exposed the late General corrupt deeds hurriedly organized a transition programme and handed over the mantle of leadership of the country to a former General and one time military head of state between 1976-1979, Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo laid the foundation of his civilian administration on the vociferous campaign and determination to eliminate corruption in the public life.

Sadly, the above reasons are always put forward as rational for military takeovers in subsequent years, but then corruption keeps increasing by leaps and bounds, as Ogunniya (2009) noted many of them who came as physicians would later leave as patients. The return and transition to democracy in May 29th 1999 marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic which was greeted with a lot of optimism and expectations as the right path to economic recovery, rule of law, transparency, accountability, and respect for the human rights and other variables of good governance and economic development. Unfortunately, the above dreams are elusive because of corruption in all facets of state operations. A few cases of corruption under the four presidents so far in the Fourth Republic will give credence to the foregoing assertion.

The Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) though made efforts to forestall corruption by establishing the anti-graft agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission

(EFCC). This notwithstanding, nearly all the state governors had corruption charges against them and because of immunity; they could not be charged (Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012). Also, Tafa Balogun, the then Inspector General of Police (IG) in Nigeria was charged with mismanagement of the police budget, tried and convicted on plea bargaining, forfeited assets worth 2.2 billion naira to the government and served 6 months jail term (Audu, 2008). Also, the Haliburton scandal involving the bribing of the contract to construct the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to a tune of \$182 million as Adebawo (2012) reported the officials in Kellogg Brown & Root LLC's (KBR) involved in the scandal have been tried and found guilty and convicted, but those of the Nigerians counterpart are working freely because the cases are under investigation.

Furthermore, the emergence of Yar'Adua in 2007 was short-lived by imminent illness till he eventually passed on in 2009 prompting Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to take over leadership after a momentary constitutional leadership crisis. The cases of corruption were in no way reduced as state actors engaged in corruption with impunity. During this regime, there was a case of 20 billion dollars unremitted crude oil sale receipts whistle blown by the then Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor Lamido Sanusi, who was late suspended and dismissed from the office (BBC, News Africa, 20/02/2014). Other cases were the Stella Odua N255 million worth purchase of bulletproof cars for official use in the aviation ministry and Diezani Madueke, a former petroleum minister was also accused of spending 10 billion Naira of government funds to maintain a private jet and a probe was immediately ordered. However, she applied for a court injunction which was granted and the probe was suspended (Eniayejuni and Evans, 2015).

Prior to the 2015 general election, there was general disenchantment and Nigerians were generally disgruntled at the spate of looting of government funds by government officials. Yet there was no visible prosecution as they used their political influence to suppress the proceedings and judgment for those in the good books of the president. Hence, the emergence of Muhamadu Buhari in the 2015 polls was predicated on his stance to fight corruption headlong as this is the only way development could be guaranteed and democracy consolidated. One of the efforts of the Buhari-led government on assuming office in May 2015 was the reactivation of some of the high-profile cases already before the courts and ensuring the cases were ongoing. One of those cases was the 'Dasukigate' - the corruption case against Col. Sambo Dasuki, Nigeria's former National Security Adviser who was accused of diverting 2.2 billion dollars meant for the procurement of arms to fight against insurgency in the country. A list of beneficiaries for this largess was made known to the public and the trial continued. More worrisomely, a close scrutiny of the 2016 budget submitted by the Buhari administration

was a stunning revelation which perhaps was a major setback to its pursuit of a corrupt-free Nigeria. The budget was exposed to have included frivolous expenditures, over-estimated contracts, and repeated expenditures amongst others. Although the president sacked top officials in the budget office, it was not a good sign of progress. According to public outcry, Buhari's anti-corruption fight was lopsided and selective as observed by Olu Falae, a prominent politician and former Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Nigeria's experience with corruption is not something new; however recently, there has been a rise in the number of corruption cases, the frequency in which they happen, the personalities involved, and the amount of money misappropriated. The main research problem of this study, therefore, is that rampant corruption drains any nation robbing it of the resources that are needed for development like infrastructure projects. Nigeria as a nation has produced leaders, who practically have nothing in mind to offer for the nation and her citizens, but to just become leaders, over the years (Maduekwe *et al.*, 2019). The common desire to most of the populace in Nigeria is to see their government achieve the highest level of development. They also yearn to go beyond that by achieving sustainable development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Sr. Hope, 1996, p.24). This one desire has been now undermined by corruption which seems to have strong effects on national development. The invasion of corruption to the country's development destroys the government's desire to raise the sustainable level of living of the poor people and hinders the provision of opportunities to develop their fullest potential (Staudt, 1991, p.29). The strategies in place so far have done little to address the challenge of corruption. The only solution that seems to be useful to Nigeria to achieve national development is to devote much of its efforts to fighting corruption by either finding a way to control or eradicate it.

Against this background, this study examined corruption and national development with a focus on Nigeria, 2015-2023.

Conceptual clarifications

Corruption

There is no single, universally recognized definition of corruption, as it can take various forms and affect different areas of society. As a result, it has been described in numerous ways, often using terms like 'economic', 'political', 'financial', 'administrative', 'bureaucratic', and 'moral or ethical'. According to Kong (1996), corruption can also be classified based on the magnitude of the offense and the status of the individuals involved, leading to distinctions between 'grand' and 'petty' corruption. The Dictionary of Social Sciences (1964) provides a straight-

forward yet thorough definition, indicating that corruption involves the exploitation of power for personal profit, prestige, or the benefit of a particular group, which constitutes a violation of legal or ethical standards. Nye (1970) defines it as behaviour that strays from the expected responsibilities of a public role due to private relationships or the pursuit of personal gain, breaching rules against certain types of private interactions. This includes practices such as bribery, nepotism, and the illegal use of public resources for private purposes.

As noted by Ubeku (1991), corrupt practices typically involve various forms of bribery fraud, including the inflation of contract values by public officials, unauthorized changes to contracts, payments for work that has not been completed, salaries for fictitious employees, excessive compensation to staff, misdirection of government revenues by officials, and intentional irregularities in accounting management. Ojo (2018) asserts that corruption is characterized by any form of deceitful, unethical, or fraudulent behaviour exhibited by those in authority or participants in transactions. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act, Section 2 (2000), further defines corruption to include bribery, fraud, and related offences. At its essence, corruption involves the misuse of power or positions of trust for personal or collective gain, whether financial or otherwise. Philip (2013) highlights that, from an African perspective, corruption encompasses practices such as outright theft, misappropriation of state resources, nepotism, preferential treatment based on personal relationships, and the manipulation of public authority for personal benefit.

This work characterizes corruption as the intentional misuse of power and influence for personal or group benefit. It is understood as a multifaceted issue with implications across legal, social, political, economic, and ethical domains. Corruption can take many forms, often involving the exploitation of public resources or roles and the use of illegitimate political power by various actors. As such, it includes practices like fraud, embezzlement, extortion, bribery, and the improper use of official positions.

Corruption in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors, including institutional vulnerabilities, inadequate ethical standards, and shortcomings in the internal management of public service entities, particularly regarding accountability and transparency. Additionally, the perception among public officials of being significantly under-compensated contributes to a distorted incentive structure. Other contributing elements include ambiguously defined governmental rules and regulations, as well as a general lack of effective law enforcement, especially concerning anti-corruption initiatives.

Development

Development is a broad concept that encompasses various dimensions. It refers to a complex process of

change that includes growth, empowerment, progress, and the management of transformations across different levels. In human society, development is a multifaceted pursuit, marked by its diverse characteristics rather than a simple linear path. Rodney (1972) offers a threefold perspective on development, which includes individual, community, and economic aspects. At the individual level, Rodney defines development as the enhancement of skills, capabilities, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material prosperity. For social groups, development signifies a continuous improvement in the ability to adapt and manage both internal and external relationships. In terms of economic development, Rodney explores the collective economic progress of societies, which enhances their capacity to interact with their surroundings. Rodney emphasizes the significance of understanding natural laws (science), their integration and practical use, as well as the advancement of tools (technology) and labour organization, all of which shape a society's interaction with its environment.

Dudley (1969) extends the definition of development to encompass not only capital accumulation and economic growth, but also equitable access to sufficient nourishment, employment, and the mitigation of income disparities. It entails a process of instigating fundamental and desirable changes that are sustainable in the long run within society. As Routledge (1995) highlighted, the term development conveys a feeling that something has changed and that this change implies betterment, advancement, optimism, progress and a general improvement of the human condition. In a broader sense, some have understood development as a social change (Apter, 1987; Kulkarni and Ranjan, 1992; Semasinghe, 2016). The UNDP clearly emphasized that "people are the real wealth of a nation" and "the objective of development should be to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives", and also that "development is primarily and fundamentally about people" (UNDP, 2010). Development signifies more than mere expansion; it signifies the empowerment of individuals and communities, the equipping of societies to navigate their surroundings, and the cultivation of a sustainable and thriving environment. This entails harnessing the capacity to influence and harness the forces of nature for personal and collective advancement (Nnavozie, 1990, cited in Oladipo, 2006). Essential to note is that development emerges as a multifaceted concept, traversing various conceptions, yet fundamentally revolving around the transformative processes shaping societal life.

From these perspectives, the intricate connection between corruption and development becomes evident. In essence, there exists a direct impact of corrupt practices on development outcomes. For instance, if development is perceived as the government or system's capacity to judiciously manage resources for enhancing citizen welfare; then corruption can be seen as a pivotal hindrance

to effective governance and development. In the Nigerian context, the deficiency in resource management capabilities arises due to the overwhelming presence of corruption, thus posing a significant impediment to desired progress in both governance and development

Theoretical framework

This research is grounded in Prebendal theory, which is primarily linked to the work of American scholar Richard Joseph. In 1987, Joseph undertook a pivotal study utilizing this theory to analyze the Patron-Client dynamics that characterize African political systems. The term "prebend" originates from ecclesiastical settings, specifically within the church, where it refers to a member's right to receive a portion of the institution's income (Abada and Oyia, 2020). Fundamentally, Prebendal theory asserts that state positions are regarded as prebends, available for appropriation by those in office who exploit them for personal gain, as well as for the benefit of their constituents and family networks. Joseph applied this framework to illustrate the pervasive sense of entitlement surrounding the use of state resources in Africa. Elected officials, civil servants, and members of their ethnic or religious communities frequently view themselves as having a rightful claim to a share of government funds.

A pivotal element of prebendalism, as outlined by Joseph, is the transformation of the office into the personal possession of the officeholder. Therefore, the direct import of prebendalism as an explanatory tool to understanding the relationship between corruption on underdevelopment on one hand and the effect of corruption on development in Nigeria is not out of place. Nevertheless, prebendalism refers to the political system where elected or appointed officials and government workers feel they have a right to a share of government revenues and use them to benefit their supporters, co-religionists and other ethnic brethren (wikipedia.com). According to Richard (1987) in describing patron-clientelism or neo-patrimonialism in Nigeria, public office is considered as prebends that can be appropriated by office holders who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their kindred. As a result of this patron-client and identity politics, Nigeria has oftentimes been one of the lowest-ranked nations for political transparency (Transparency International, 2016).

The application of prebendal theory reveals that corruption in Nigeria has become not only a widespread occurrence but also a fundamental aspect of daily life. This issue has infiltrated all levels of Nigerian society, transforming it into a cultural standard. Over time, this phenomenon has been fostered, maintained, and accepted as normal. Nigerian leaders have become infamous for their roles in theft, embezzlement, and the diversion of resources meant for development (Bakare,

2011). Such a corrupt environment leaves the nation susceptible to terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, religious strife, and other elements that contribute to widespread suffering. Richard (1987) argues that Nigeria's challenges stem not only from pervasive corruption but also from its deeply entrenched prebendal nature. Under this system, it is anticipated that state positions will be utilized for the personal gain of officeholders, their associates, and family members, rather than for the benefit of the broader society (Richard, 1987).

In Nigeria, the possession of state power equates to the ability to access state resources. The fierce competition for political roles often overlooks the legitimate functions these offices are meant to serve. Public officials in key government roles frequently view this as a chance to appropriate state resources, primarily for their benefit and, to a lesser extent, for their family networks. High-profile examples, such as Diezani, the former Minister of Petroleum, and James Ibori, the ex-governor of Delta State, illustrate how African elites perceive government resources. The assets confiscated from these figures highlight the vast extent of their misconduct. This prevailing attitude fosters cronyism, nepotism, and other self-serving behaviours, compelling public officials to leverage their positions for the exclusive advantage of their groups, often to the detriment of the wider community. Abada and Onyia (2020) rightly note that "the rule of law is the shield that protects the individual from government corruption". This exploitation of power for personal gain reflects the fundamental principles of the prebendal theory, where state offices are transformed into means for personal profit, thereby entrenching corruption within Nigeria's socio-political framework.

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Corruptions in the government and the private sector have become the most discussed topic in Nigeria in recent years. It manifests in various forms and many types of transactions within and across levels of government, within and between private enterprises of different types and scales of operations, between principal actors in private and public sectors, and within civil society organizations. ActionAid Nigeria (2015) identifies major manifestations and dimensions of corruption in the country to include the following:

- Nepotism and cronyism
- Rent-seeking and kick-backs
- Bribery and extortion
- Money transfer fraud
- Advanced fee fraud
- Embezzlement and misapplication of funds
- Impropriety

- Tax negotiation
- Non-remittance or under-remittance of revenue
- Subsidy scandal
- Crude oil theft or illegal oil bunkering
- Diversion of local government allocations
- Pension fund scandals
- Inflation of public expenditure and falsification of records
- Fictitious purchase
- The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and non-remittance of funds into the Federation's account
- Bottlenecks
- Foreign exchange malpractices

Some of the key drivers of corruption in the country are officials in the executive arm, the legislature, the judiciary, the law enforcement agency, civil servants/public officers, politicians and political parties, corruption in the private sector, the oil and gas sector and the banking sector (ActionAid Nigeria, 2015).

Noteworthy, the issue of corruption is not a 21st century problem of Nigeria as a nation. Its manifestation started to surface shortly after the attainment of political independence from Britain in 1960. In 1962, the declaration of a state of emergency in the Western region of the young country was attributed partly to the issue of corruption. It was followed by the suspension of the Action Group (AG) party and in its place, an interim government was appointed, headed by Chief M. A. Majekodunmi. Subsequently, a commission of inquiry (the Coker Commission) found Chief Awolowo guilty of misuse of Western regional funds (Osaghae, 2011). Specifically, he diverted funds from the regional government-owned National Investment and Properties Corporation totalling N4.4 million in cash and N1.3 million in overdraft from the national bank to finance the AG and publish newspapers supporting the party (Osaghae, 2011). The statistics in Human Rights Watch (2007) reveal that between 1960 and 1999, the Nigerian ruling elite could not account for about \$400 billion of national revenue.

Transparency International report over the years places Nigeria among the most corrupt countries in the world. In 2011, Nigeria was ranked 143 out of 183 countries. In 2012, Nigeria was rated 139 out of 176 countries and in 2013, Nigeria was placed at the 144 position out of 177 countries. In 2014, Nigeria was rated 136 out of 175 countries. Although from 2014 to today, Nigeria has not made any improvement and has remained at 136 in the corruption perception index (Transparency International, 2016; 2017; 2023). Corruption has permeated every aspect of Nigerian society and has become a norm. It has not only affected the functioning of governmental institutions but also the private sector, resulting in a lack of trust in public institutions and a decrease in foreign investment.

Table 1. Statistics of Corruption Perception Index of Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.

Year	Corruption Ranking	Corruption Index
1999	98 of 99	16/100
2000	90 of 90	12/100
2001	90 of 91	10/100
2002	101 of 102	16/100
2003	132 of 133	14/100
2004	144 of 146	10/100
2005	152 of 158	19/100
2006	142 of 147	22/100
2007	147 of 150	22/100
2008	121 of 150	20/100
2009	130 of 150	25/100
2010	134 of 178	24/100
2011	143 of 183	24/100
2012	139 of 176	27/100
2013	144 of 177	25/100
2014	136 of 175	27/100
2015	136 of 168	26/100
2016	136 of 176	28/100
2017	148 of 180	27/100
2018	144 of 180	27/100
2019	146 of 180	26/100
2020	149 of 180	25/100
2021	154 of 180	24/100
2022	150 of 180	24/100
2023	145 of 180	25/100

Source: Countryeconomy.com (2023): Nigeria - Corruption Perceptions Index.

Examining the table closely will reveal Nigeria's current corruption position in relation to other nations. For instance, Nigeria only scored 25 out of a possible 100 points in 2023 and was ranked 145th out of 180 countries and territories. A score of 0 denotes extensive levels of corruption, while a score of 100 means 'highly clean' status. For statistics on Nigeria's corruption perception index, see Table 1.

Over the years, myriad agencies both governmental and non-governmental have consistently reported instances of significant financial malfeasance within Nigeria. Startling figures, often in the billions, have been cited as being siphoned from Nigeria's public funds. An illustrative example lies in the period between 1960 and 1999, during which an astounding sum exceeding \$400 billion is believed to have been embezzled from Nigeria's coffers (Akinyemi, 2010, p.4 cited in Ojo, 2018, p.48). This statistic is but one among a deluge of similar figures. A case in point is the Global Financial Integrity report published in 2010, indicating that Nigeria suffered a staggering loss of

\$217.8 billion between 1970 and 2008 due to illegal financial flow. In 2016 alone, illicit financial flows through Nigeria's banking system amounted to over \$15.7 billion (approximately N6 trillion naira), according to a revelation by the Global Financial Integrity Group in Washington D.C., USA (Daily Sun, September 7, 2016, p.15, cited in Ojo, 2018, p.48), solidifying Nigeria's standing among the world's top ten contributors to illicit financial flows. Given these disconcerting facts, one may question the efficacy of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies. The characterization by former British Prime Minister David Cameron, who quipped that Nigeria is a "fantastically corrupt country on earth", might indeed hold more truth than jest (Ojo, 2018, p.48).

Corruption in Nigeria has been correctly summarized in Akinyemi (2010) as the biggest and fastest growing industry in Nigeria. While petroleum is the largest revenue earner (accounting for between 90-95% of national wealth), corruption is the largest consumer of the revenue. Unfortunately, its consumption is in the hands of a few individuals and corporate persons while the nation wallows in abject poverty, hunger, disease and debt. The extent of corruption in Nigeria is envisaged in various incidents that have occurred over the years. For instance, the federal audit report of the federal ministries and parastatals was made public for the first time ever by Vincent Azie the acting Auditor-General of the federation. This audit report revealed that more than N23 billion was lost in ten major ministries in 2001 (Nigerian News Watch, 2003).

In 2007, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) filed a case before the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice in Abuja arguing that massive corruption in the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) amounted to a denial of the right to free, quality and compulsory education for Nigerian children. The initiative led to a discovery by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) of over N3 billion misappropriated by top officials of the UBEC (SERAP, 2013).

In 2009, SERAP sued the Nigerian government in court again over the failure to effectively tackle corruption in the power sector which resulted in the theft of \$16 billion meant for power projects (SERAP, 2013). The following year, SERAP and five other NGOs filed another suit against the federal government seeking an official publication of reports on missing \$12.4 billion oil windfall. Unfortunately, the case was dismissed by Justice Kolawole in November 2012 (SERAP, 2013). SERAP also sued the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in 2012 over failure to disclose authorization of spending of government subsidy for 2011. The information being sought relates to the spending on fuel subsidies in 2011 and in particular the authorization of N1.26 trillion paid by the CBN (SERAP, 2013). Several similar cases of corruption are pending before the court.

Cases of corruption also relate to the Legislature in the

administration under the Peoples' Democratic Party and the current ruling All Progressives Congress. For example, in a report by Premium Times News (16th September, 2019), the National Assembly engaged in various scandals of contract awards, fraud and sleazes amounting to billions of naira and dollars over two decades of law making from 1999-2019. According to the report, #1.8trillion was spent in maintenance of the National Assembly. In a breakdown of the budget allocation of the National Assembly reveals a disturbing story of mass embezzlement within the period. In 2018 Senator Shehu Sani of Kaduna Central revealed that senators' running cost stood at #13.5million monthly despite allegations that senators paid themselves additional allowances without approval by the Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission. At the State Houses of Assembly, members received #6billion per annum (Premium Times, 24th September, 2019). From this astonishing revelation therefore no wonder politicians and political parties fight to the tooth to win elections and control state power at all costs.

That corruption is an endemic cancer within the civil service in Nigeria is incontestable. In fact, the systemic decay in the civil service of this country today can be attributable to corruption most notably bribery to solicit for undeserved favour or to get access to rights. On 29th of August, 2019, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission conducted a probe of \$16 billion power scandal involving Head of Finance, Marvel Emeziele and Head of Compensation to Communities, Eze M.C. Odigbo of the Niger Delta Power Holding Company for supervising the failed \$16 billion power project. The two officials were further accused of not accounting for #850 million paid for compensation to communities where components of the power projects were sited (The Nation Newspapers, 29th August, 2019).

In the Private sector, according to Magu, corrupt practices were also prevalent, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission arrested two-hundred Internet fraudsters and recovered #14million from wire transfers (The Nation Newspapers, 2019).

Corruption in the public sector remains a sore spot in Nigeria's quest to instill transparency and accountability in the polity. The failure to deliver social services, the endemic problem of power supply and the collapse of infrastructure are all linked with corruption ... Analysis of EFCC data (2012, p.10) shows that embezzlement and diversion of public funds are the most common forms of public sector corruption. Owasanoye (2014) in a recent study of fifty-five (55) high profile cases of corruption charged to the court by the EFCC between 1999 and 2012 involved a total sum of one trillion, three hundred and fifty four billion, one hundred and thirty-two million and four hundred thousand naira (N1,354,132,400,000:00). These stark revelations provide insight into the reason behind Nigeria's underdevelopment. The sheer magnitude of these illicit financial outflows would undoubtedly hinder

any nation's progress. The diverted funds have the potential to transform the country's fortunes by generating employment opportunities, driving infrastructure development, and establishing top-tier healthcare facilities for its citizens, ultimately combating poverty. The unprecedented scale of these illegal financial outflows poses a challenge that no country, even in the West, could endure unscathed. Unfortunately, the will to combat corruption in all tiers of government is still very weak. In some cases, especially in the states and local governments, the political will to fight corruption is non-existent, as the workings of the polity are intricately connected with corruption activities ... It is no surprise therefore that most of the predicate offences to money laundering are connected with corruption within the officialdom.

The government on its part over the years has put in place mechanisms to combat corruption and attract national development. One of the political objectives enshrined in the 1999 constitution is that the states shall abolish all forms of corruption practices and abuse of power. In pursuant of the objectives, the constitution, in the third schedule provides for the Code of Conduct Bureau, to ensure that public officers conform to ethics of incorruptible behaviour, through the declaration of their assets before and after holding public offices. It also provides for the Code of Conduct Tribunal to try public servants. The Public Servant covered by the Bureau and Tribunal include: the President, the Vice President, Governors, Deputy Governors of States, Justice of Courts, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Army Chiefs, Police Chiefs, top civil servants, diplomats in Nigeria and abroad, Chairmen, members and staff of Federal, States and Local Government, Chairmen Boards and corporations and similarly placed public officers. The constitution also provides for the establishment of an Electoral Tribunal at all levels of elections in order to ensure a corrupt-free electoral process.

Also, acknowledging that corruption is the biggest issue facing the Nigerian public sector, previous Nigerian administrations implemented several anti-corruption initiatives and programmes to combat the problem. These include SERVICOM (2006), the Independent and Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) Act (2000), the EFCC (2002), the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), and others. The result so far achieved is insignificant when compared with the quantum of corruption that is being perpetrated in the three tiers of government parastatals and the private sector respectively. Corruption in the Fourth Republic has surpassed and or is the highest since Nigeria attained political independence.

Regrettably, given the widespread corruption in the Nigerian public sector, these initiatives and tactics had minimal effect in the fight against corruption. Ijewereme and Dunmade (2014), cited by Ogbewere (2015, p. 1), noted that recent developments in corruption accusations in high-profile cases demonstrate shame in the use of plea

Table 2 List of the Nigerian recipients of lenient punishments.

No.	Name	Offense	Sentence	Date	Court
1	Cecilia Ibru, former CEO of the defunct Oceanic Bank Plc.	25 Counts of bank and security fraud.	Six months imprisonment and forfeited 190 billion naira US\$1.2 billion) assets and cash	October 2010	Federal High Court Lagos
2	Tafa Balogun, former Inspector General of Police	Failing to declare his assets & his Front companies Were convicted of 8 counts of money laundering.	Six months imprisonment and seizure of his assets – reportedly worth in excess of US\$ 150 million.	November 2005	Federal High Court Abuja
3	Lucky Igbinedion, former Governor of Edo state	Failing to declare his assets and his Front company was convicted of 27 counts of money laundry.	Six months imprisonment with an option of N3.5m fine and seizure of some of his assets acquired with proceeds of corruption. Igbinedion immediately paid the fine in the court room and agreed to forfeit some of his assets	December 2008	Federal High Court Enugu
4	Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, former Governor of Bayelsa state	Failing to declare his assets & his front companies were convicted of money laundering.	Two years imprisonment & forfeited some of his assets.	July 2007	Federal High Court Lagos.

Source: Adapted from Ogbewere (2015, p.10).

bargains. People will not be discouraged from engaging in corruption if the penalties for unethical and corrupt behaviour are lenient and based on plea deals (as in the case of the convicted former governor of Edo State, Lucky Igbinedion). Table 2 lists Nigerians who have received lenient sentences (Onah *et al.*, 2022).

An overview of this table highlights the different offences and penalties faced by these public servants. Upon closer inspection of the third row, it becomes evident that Lucky Igbinedion, the former governor of Edo State, received a six-month prison sentence along with an option to pay a fine of N3.5 million, which he paid directly. This payment underscored the minimal impact of the fine relative to his wealth. When penalties are stringent, public employees are likely to be deterred from engaging in corrupt and unethical behaviour. Historical patterns indicate that as long as politicians continue to amass wealth through corrupt means, civil servants may not perceive any wrongdoing in leveraging their positions for personal gain. Despite the efforts of the anti-corruption movement, there has been a noted increase in corruption, as highlighted by Izekor and Okaro (2018, p. 9). Nyoni (2018) supported this view, stating that the corruption landscape in Nigeria has shown that public officials and politicians have repeatedly failed to implement their anti-corruption principles effectively.

The case of Nigeria stands as a compendium of examples, illustrating its unfortunate status as one of the most corrupt nations globally. Remarkably, Nigeria boasts an elaborate framework of anti-corruption legislation, agencies and institutions; however, the crux of the issue lies not in the absence of anti-corruption measures, but in

the challenge of enforcement. Despite the intricacy of these anti-corruption legislations and constitutional provisions, corruption continues to surge unabated, serving as a formidable impediment to the nation's political, social, and economic advancement (Transparency International, 2020).

Impact of corruption on national development

Development, in its essence, involves a government's ability to efficiently manage resources to enhance the well-being of its citizens. On the flip side, corruption acts as a significant hindrance to good governance and sustainable development. The Nigerian government has notably struggled to effectively manage its resources due to the rampant issue of corruption, which poses a grave threat to both development and good governance (Oladipo, 2006). Corruption is symptomatic of governance mismanagement, as suggested by Ojo (2018), signalling an underlying issue in state management. Its impact on Nigeria's national development is profound as highlighted below:

1. High level of poverty: Poverty is one of the outcomes, with a significant portion of the Nigerian population living in dire conditions. For instance, 71% of Nigerians live on less than \$1 (US) a day, mirroring similar figures in other African countries (Akinyemi, 2010, cited in Ojo, 2018). According to Mazi Mbah *et al.* (2019), poverty in developing countries continues to be a real and significant feature of these societies. The level of poverty is high in Nigeria for obvious reasons.

Money budgeted for economic development and empowerment of the citizenry is diverted into private pockets and bank accounts abroad. The citizens are left impoverished. Even when poverty alleviation programmes are initiated, the funds for them end up in private accounts here and overseas. Corruption as the biggest obstacle for poverty reduction is a problem for social and economic development.

2. Poor investment opportunities: Donor nations and international conglomerates looking for where to invest their capital outside their home countries shy away from Nigeria because of the level of corruption. This is equally the cause of capital flight from Nigeria, when those companies that are already there can no longer cope, they move to neighboring countries. Corruption's adverse effects encompass reduced industrial policy effectiveness, encouragement of operating businesses in unofficial sectors to evade tax and regulatory laws, and a discouragement of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) due to the unattractive environment. Corruption has created an artificial stock of both local and international debt. These loans were obtained and stolen instead of being used for the original purposes for which they were intended.
3. Unemployment: Unemployment is another repercussion of rampant corruption, particularly affecting the youth. In Nigeria, more than 40% of the youth are unemployed (Ojo, 2018). Infrastructure is deteriorating, and access to basic necessities like clean water is lacking for many. The effects of corruption span multiple dimensions, as highlighted by Umana (2018) in Ibrahim *et al.* (2023) including political, social, and economic spheres. Corruption leads to the abandonment of projects that could have accelerated national development in all facets. Examples are; the Ajeokuta and Aladja Steel project, Itakpe Iron ore, the Paper mill in Akwa Iboku in Cross River state, Aluminum Flat Sheet also in Cross River state and so many abandoned projects of Federal, State and Local governments. There is also re-cycling of projects, 10% kicks back syndrome at the three tiers of government.
4. Economic impact: In most cases, the familiar tales of fortunes in natural resources like oil, gold, coal and other resources such as naira and hundreds of dollars were stashed away in secret hiding places and foreign banks by corrupt public officials including the acquisition of real estate abroad. The impact of these misconducts is devastating on a massive scale, especially for Nigeria facing perennial and severe foreign exchange shortages. However, corruption does not have to be on a grand scale to inflict serious damage. There are other adverse effects that can be just as damaging for a poor country. Corruption diverts limited funds, hampering economic progress and obstructing policy changes necessary for development. Although direct financial losses from corruption are substantial, the indirect costs, such as economic distortions, inefficiencies, and waste, are more detrimental over the long term. Corruption raises business costs, erodes revenue, and leads to subpar service delivery. This perpetuates poverty and hinders upward mobility, disproportionately affecting the poor.
5. Insecurity: Security is one, if not the primary responsibility of any nation to its citizens, but when the money budgeted for it cannot be accounted for, no jobs for the university graduates, pensioners are not paid, and universities are on strike most of the academic year. That is the reason for armed robbery, kidnappings, ritual killings and so many other vices that are on the increase.
6. Poor infrastructural development: The bane of any nation saddled with corruption is poor infrastructural development. Hospitals are non-existent, where they exist, they are not stocked with medicine and medical facilities, and there are no qualified personnel. Nigerians now engage in medical tourism more than any other nationals worldwide. In this 21st Century, in some parts of Nigeria, there is no pipe-borne water for drinking. People resort to drinking whatever water they see thereby increasing and spreading diseases. Motor-able tarred roads are non-existent in most urban and rural areas of the country. Electricity which is the main ingredient of industrialization is still non-existent in some parts of the country, most factories and industries resort to running generator sets thereby increasing the cost of production and the cost of their final products in the market. Lack of funding has reduced our universities to less than secondary schools. Nigerian universities that ranked very high in the sixties now have deteriorated to the level that our students are found all over the world in some funny and less acceptable universities. A four-year course in a Nigerian university now takes six years to finish because most of the time lecturers are on strike because money budgeted for education has grown wings and vanished.
7. Underdevelopment: In all the countries like Nigeria where corruption has become the norm in the government, one thing that is glaring clear, is national underdevelopment. No one genuinely wants to occupy an office because of what he or she wants to contribute to national development. Their primary aim and interest is how they can better their own life through the office they are called to serve. Budgets for their offices disappear unceremoniously without a trace. With such a mindset and trends, the nation will remain underdeveloped unless something drastic is done.
8. Corruption alters societal values in Nigeria: Corruption alters societal values, shifting the focus from moral virtues to the relentless pursuit of wealth and power. Corruption increases inequality, decreases popular

accountability and political responsiveness, and thus produces rising frustration and hardship among citizens. As highlighted by Roce-Ackerman, cited in Ojo (2018), good conduct takes a back seat, correlated with diminished investment and economic growth. Education, health and indeed the entire economic sector is at its lowest ebb because of corruption. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) reported that Nigerians have about \$189 billion in overseas banks. This is the money stolen from Nigeria and stashed overseas. It is this money that is oiling the economy of Europe. If that money had been invested in Nigeria, Nigeria could have been a better place. No foreigner will steal his country's money and take it to Nigeria or any Third World Country and bank.

9. Corruption undermines good governance and economic development: Corruption affects the functioning of public services by creating political instability and the ability to make a consequential impact on the sustainability of public funds because resources are often redirected to fuel parallel economies. Systematic corruption mainly in the public sector erodes public trust within the government institution; the situation also has the ability to damage public integrity and distort sector outcomes. It tarnishes the international image of the country, discouraging foreign investment and hurting trade. Inefficiencies in public services arise, and crucial infrastructural facilities are misused or vandalized. This can lead to inflation, unemployment, declining output, and a deteriorating standard of living.
10. Corruption sows seeds of political instability and lawlessness: It could upturn ethnic balance and cause serious problems in the areas of national integration and the legitimacy of that government. It leads to the killing of political opponents. Above all, it makes governance ineffective and causes brain drain.

CONCLUSION

Corruption and national development, a study of Nigeria, 2015-2023 presents a very disturbing picture of the state of corruption and indeed, governance in Nigeria. It shows that corruption is pervasive and public concern is high. It also highlights the negative toll corruption takes on the productivity and efficiency of both the public and private sectors and on popular welfare. The causes of corruption include a combination of factors: the perception of public officials that they are extremely underpaid; deficiencies in the internal management of public service organizations (in terms of accountability and transparency), poorly defined government rules and regulations, weak enforcement of law in general and anti-corruption measures in particular. Preventing and combating corruption

requires a comprehensive approach, but only in a climate of transparency, accountability and participation by all members of society is this possible. Accordingly, the following recommendations are made:

1. The immunity clause should be removed from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) in order to deny public office holders the opportunity to engage in corruption and other forms of impunity and escape unsanctioned, and to serve as a deterrent to public officers from engaging in corruption. The specific action to be taken is the review of the 1999 Constitution to make it mandatory for the president, governors, and chairmen of local government councils and other political office holders to be tried in the court of law for criminal offences committed while in office.
2. The corruption-fighting agencies such as the Police, Judiciary, EFCC, ICPC, and SERVICOM should be streamlined, reformed and strengthened in order to avoid administrative conflicts from similar agencies; be cost-effective; freed from executive and other forms of control; and facilitate optimum performance. Also, the federal government should ensure that all anti-corruption agencies are autonomous and given all the powers and resources they need to discharge their mandates of fighting corruption. Broaden the Nigeria Anti-Corruption coalition by involving a wider range of stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, the media, civil society organizations and the general public need to work together to curb this crime and to help build public confidence in anti-corruption efforts. That is to encourage the active involvement of the business sector and NGOs, including religious bodies in national anti-corruption programmes. Strengthen ongoing institutional reforms with specific emphasis on improving internal management practices and salaries; streamlining government rules and regulations; as well as promoting ethics and accountability.
3. Increase public awareness of official anti-corruption measures thereby creating a corruption reporting mechanism with proper protection of whistleblowers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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