



# The Nigerian State and It's Responses to Corruption



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**Abstract:** *Endemic corruption has long undermined Nigerian society. Successive governments have implemented various anti-corruption measures; however, the impact remains unclear given the persistent corruption indices. This study employs qualitative content analysis of secondary sources, including academic publications, news articles, and organisational reports, to critically evaluate the outcomes of anti-corruption measures. Results indicate modest improvements on some metrics, such as bribery rates, but grand corruption endures largely unchecked. Reforms have increased transparency in daily interactions but have failed to transform political accountability. Partial technocratic fixes cannot remedy entrenched patronage politics, legal-judicial weaknesses, flawed incentives, and impunity for elites. Recommendations include empowering reformers, strengthening watchdogs through autonomy and resources, boosting transparency on oil revenues, prosecuting powerful kleptocrats, and mobilising citizens and media as monitors. For sustainable change, technical reforms must be matched with profound shifts in oversight, transparency, judicial integrity, political will, and cultural attitudes that enable graft. Nigeria possesses the resources and dynamism to curb corruption if leaders govern for citizens, not personal gain. The path ahead requires moving beyond current incremental measures to enact far-reaching systemic changes underpinned by accountability, ethics, and justice.*

**Keywords:** Anti-Corruption, Bribery, Corruption, Judiciary, Political Corruption, Principal Agent theory, Reforms.  
**JEL Code:** D73, P16, P48.

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## Introduction

Corruption has been a persistent and pervasive challenge in Nigeria since independence in 1960. It undermines governance, democratic accountability, economic development, and stability (Adejumo & Ayedogbon, 2022; Nwogbo & Ighodalo, 2021; Osakede et al., 2015). The

country has consistently ranked in the bottom quarter of Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index, with scores indicating entrenched graft. In 2022, Nigeria ranked 149 out of 180 countries on the index, putting it among the most corrupt countries globally. This endemic corruption has enriched a small political elite while depriving the general citizens of basic public services, infrastructure development, and economic opportunities (Julius Otusanya, 2011).

Various forms of public sector corruption are prevalent, including bribery, embezzlement of public funds, contract inflation, nepotism in appointments, and misuse of official positions for personal gain (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023; Sebake & Sebola, 2014). Such graft has severely weakened the government's ability to function effectively and provide basic healthcare facilities, education, power, and transportation infrastructure. Similarly, corruption and poor governance undermines public trust in government institutions and fuels unrest. Nigeria has continued to suffer from regional and ethnic tensions, episodic unrest, and high crime rates in different parts of the country. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in the North still lingers with minimal depletion.

Domestic civil society groups have increasingly pressured the government to tackle graft, given the harsh impact on ordinary Nigerians. International partners including the European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK), and United States of America (USA) have also demanded that Nigeria take meaningful action against systemic corruption in exchange for foreign aid and investment (Aderonmu, 2011; Itodo & O'Regan, 2018; Lambsdorff, 1999). In response to domestic and international pressures, the Federal Government under different dispensations has initiated anti-corruption agencies, implemented public financial management reforms, and taken steps to increase transparency in governance.

Key anti-corruption agencies established in order to tackle corruption in Nigeria include the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). Prominent among the public financial reforms include the Treasury Single Account (TSA) system which consolidated government accounts into a unified TSA at the Central Bank, reducing graft opportunities (Aiyede, 2008). The Integrated Personnel Payroll System (IPPS) also aims to remove ghost workers and payroll manipulation from the government payroll who would draw fraudulent salaries. Though, the two reforms had been reorganized by the Tinubu's administration for greater efficiency. The government has also required all government ministries, departments and agencies to implement International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) toward improving transparency and compliance with global best practices (Enofe et al., 2017; Onukelobi et al., 2019).

Similarly, individual Nigerian states have also enacted anti-corruption policies, though with varying levels of success and commitment by state officials. For example, states like Lagos have taken steps like creating anti-graft agencies and task forces, implementing TSA systems, and instituting public sector reforms (Roy, 2017). The State Government established the Public Complaints and Anti-Corruption Commission so as to investigate graft related cases, though, the impact of the commission's anti-corruption activities is yet to be widely felt across the state. While many state governments have shown indications of political will to tackle corruption within their administrations, other governors reportedly pay lip service to anti-graft efforts by continuing to take kickbacks on contracts and making questionable appointments. The governors refuse to implement TSA systems and also reject transparency and disclosure to the citizens with regard state finances. The diversity in state responses

demonstrates the difficulties of replicating federal anti-corruption initiatives at the sub-national level across the federating 36 states.

However, a key question remains regarding whether these anti-corruption measures have significantly reduced corruption or merely led to superficial compliance by public officials without changing underlying incentives and practices that fuel graft. High-level scandals continue to periodically emerge, indicating that systemic corruption persists. Moreso, further evidence-based analysis is required to determine if federal and state anti-corruption measures have had any positive impact on promoting peace and stability, or if endemic graft continues to destabilise Nigeria unabated. Broadly judging effectiveness requires looking beyond arrests and asset seizures to see if public perceptions of corruption have changed for the better after years of anti-graft rhetoric and initiatives.

Corruption in Nigeria manifests in various forms, including petty corruption, bureaucratic corruption, grand corruption, and political corruption. While this study recognises the prevalence of different types of corruption, the primary focus is on political corruption due to its systemic nature and its disproportionate impact on governance, resource allocation, and national stability. Political corruption drives many of the institutional weaknesses that allow other forms of corruption to flourish. By examining political corruption, this study addresses the core of Nigeria's governance challenges, while also acknowledging that petty and administrative corruption are interrelated issues that are briefly discussed within the broader analysis.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### *i. Corruption*

The problem of corruption persists across societies and historical eras. But what constitutes corruption exactly? Transparency International (2023) offers a useful definition centered on "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". This captures public sector graft but corruption also occurs in the private sphere. The World Bank (1997) expands further by referring to corruption as the use of public office for private benefit, including bribery and clientelism. Fuzzy areas must also be considered - like lobbying and patronage systems that may enable legal but questionable conduct (Norad 2009).

Fundamentally, corrupt acts betray the trust placed in an individual to responsibly carry out obligations and duties. It is the violation of institutional or social norms and duties for unfair advantage (Jain 2001). But perceptions of improper conduct are influenced by culture. An act deemed unacceptable in one society - say gift-giving to a public utility officer - could be customary elsewhere, breaking no social contract. So subjective interpretations matter alongside institutional definitions centered on rule violations (Philp 1997).

The concept encompasses complex phenomena from high-level abuses of power like grand corruption involving heads of state down to petty administrative corruption. But scholars debate where the threshold lies between corruption and basic human impulse. Are illegal favors between friends always unjust? There are also debates around means versus ends - bribery could arguably enable someone to afford lifesaving surgery. Does the context justify it (Heidenheimer & Johnston 2001)? These dilemmas highlight why corruption judgments involve gradations rather than absolutes, underscoring the need for context (Marquette & Peiffer 2015).

In essence, corruption centers on breached obligations and informal social contracts established between public servants and citizens. But practical definitions must navigate individual and cultural relativism alongside institutional parameters. Anti-corruption reforms are thus complex balancing acts attempting to align diverse expectations, norms and incentives.

### *ii. Political Corruption*

Political corruption refers to the misuse or abuse of public office for private gain (Nwogbo & Ighodalo, 2021). It involves public servants and elected officials leveraging their positions of power over government resources and decisions to benefit themselves, their cronies, or their supporters. Forms of political corruption are varied but often involve patronage, bribery, embezzlement, and fraud. For instance, a legislator may steer a lucrative contract towards a company and receive kickbacks in return. Or an official may pocket funds meant for public services. Nepotism - favoring friends and family for jobs or contracts - is common too (Arowosegbe, 2017). What fuels systematic graft is distortions in political and economic incentives (Hutchcroft, 1997). Politics in many countries operates as winner-takes-all, where accessing power enables distributing patronage. This encourages self-enrichment over public welfare (Moti, 2012). Nigeria's oil wealth concentrating power and money in the state further enables corruption instead of accountability to citizens (Sheni, 2021).

Over time, patronage politics and impunity become entrenched. Elites believe they can loot the system with no consequences (Igbokwe, 2020). For the public, this erodes trust and state legitimacy. Surveys show most Nigerians see office holders as "extremely corrupt" (Abdulkareem et al., 2021). This broken contract stems from institutions failing to deliver governance for citizens' benefit.

The impacts of unchecked political corruption range from inequality to instability (Adejumo & Ayedogbon, 2022). Systemic graft drains money needed for roads, healthcare, and education. Citizens left behind can resent corrupt elites, sparking unrest. Graft also indirectly bankrolls groups like Boko Haram through money laundering and inflated contracts (Enweremadu, 2019).

### **Dynamics of Political Corruption in Nigeria**

Political corruption has become deeply entrenched in Nigeria due to a confluence of historical factors and institutional weaknesses that enable graft to flourish with impunity (Idris, 2019). Historically, patronage politics and rent-seeking behavior became ingrained during decades of military rule in Nigeria after independence (Igbokwe, 2020). Successive military dictatorships consolidated power and maintained support by rewarding loyal elites with access to lucrative state resources and burgeoning oil revenues (Arowosegbe, 2017). This system of patronage networks, cronyism, and self-enrichment became deeply entrenched. It then carried over into the transition to multi-party democracy, infecting the new political class.

The underlying incentive structure of Nigerian politics continues to encourage graft, patronage and rent-seeking behavior (Hutchcroft, 1997). Political competition revolves heavily around patronage - accessing power and resources enables rewarding supporters with public sector employment, contracts, and access to state revenues (Moti, 2012). Nigerian politics operates as a "winner takes all" system, where winning elections is seen as a vehicle for dispensing patronage to constituents rather than as a responsibility to govern justly. There are usually very few restraints on the power exercised by the executive, enabling misrule (Abada et al., 2023).

Additionally, Nigeria's rentier economy from oil wealth accrues directly to the government rather than citizens, enlarging the scope for patronage and reducing pressures for accountability (Akinola, 2017; Gboyega et al., 2011). As the government relies overwhelmingly on oil revenues rather than taxes, it feels little need to expend resources well or transparently. Neopatrimonialism is widespread, with patrons at the top exchanging state resources and favors further down the chain in return for political support and loyalty (Sheni, 2021; Van Gool & Beekers, 2010).

For instance, local government council chairs are expected to remit money back up the chain to state governors who got them appointed (AbdulKareem et al., 2018). This patron-clientelism substitutes personalised authority for formal rules. Ultimately, these incentives and dynamics enable a culture of impunity, where politicians believe they can loot the system without consequences. Because patronage and graft are so ingrained in political culture, there are no effective disincentives for corruption. Few leaders display political will for reforms that could undermine the system from which they benefit (Elijah, 2007; Okonjo-Iweala, 2014). Institutionally, Nigeria suffers from persistently weak rule of law and insufficient accountability mechanisms which have enabled corruption to become endemic and systemic (Adejumo et al., 2013; Kpundeh, 2004; Mohammed et al., 2019; Okoli et al., 2021). Anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) are affected by persistent political interference that hampers its operational independence and its ability to bring charges against influential figures unhindered (Adegbami & Ganiyu, 2023; Okoli et al., 2021).

The EFCC's reliance on the political class for funding and appointments further compounds these challenges. Agbaje (2011) argued that this interference, often attributed to vested interests, compromises the commission's impartiality and undermines its effectiveness in combating financial crimes. These issues underscore the pressing need for reforms that will insulate the EFCC from political interference and undue pressures, ensuring that it can discharge its duties with integrity and autonomy toward combating corruption and economic offenses or sabotage more effectively.

Different analysts and scholars such as Aka (2015) and Mbaku (2019) observed that the Nigerian judiciary also faces significant vulnerabilities when dealing with corruption related cases, often susceptible to manipulation and unnecessary delay tactics. A major issue is the relatively low pay of judges, leaving them vulnerable to corruption and bribery. Powerful defendants, particularly in high-profile corruption cases, frequently exploit legal loopholes, including jurisdictional technicalities, perpetual injunctions and *ex parte* motions, to evade prosecution or drag cases out indefinitely (Ayodeji & Odukoya, 2014; Ikpeze, 2013). These delay tactics in justice dispensation not only contribute to the postponement of justice but it can also subvert it entirely. The lack of institutional safeguards within the system to hold the political elite accountable exacerbates this problem, eroding public trust in the judicial process and the overall fight against corruption.

### **Efforts by Government to Combat Corruption in Nigeria**

#### ***i. Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)***

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), was established in 2003, it holds a crucial role in Nigeria's fight against financial crimes, including money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, tax evasion, and terror financing (Obuah, 2010). It was formed to combat corruption, particularly within the political sphere, and has made significant strides in investigating and prosecuting high-profile cases involving politicians and former governors who have been implicated in corrupt practices (Nwoba & Monday, 2018).

Over the years, the EFCC has been involved in numerous investigations and legal proceedings that have exposed cases of graft and malfeasance among government officials and other related criminalities. These actions have indicated that financial crimes will get investigated, and they have contributed to a growing awareness of the importance of transparency and accountability in public office. The EFCC have handled several high cases of corruption involving personalities like the former Inspector Generals of Police (IGPs) Tafa Balogun and Samuel Arase in addition to Joshua Dariye and Jolly Nyame all former Governors. The commission has also prosecuted several cases related to cybercrimes that have resulted in returning the proceeds to those swindled by the yahoo boys as well as confiscating their properties.

However, the EFCC's effectiveness has faced several challenges. One of the primary issues is funding constraints, which have limited the commission's ability to carry out its operations effectively. Adequate financial resources are crucial for conducting investigations, hiring skilled personnel, and implementing anti-corruption initiatives. Without sufficient funding, the EFCC's efforts are hampered, and it struggles to meet the magnitude of the tasks it faces. Another critical concern relates to the perception of the EFCC's independence. There have been allegations of political interference in the commission's operations, which has raised questions about its decisional autonomy. Critics argue that cases are sometimes selectively pursued, and investigations tend to target political opponents or those who have fallen out of favour with the ruling government, rather than being entirely impartial and non-partisan in their approach.

Political interference or meddling in the affairs of the conduct of EFCC have resulted in the unceremonious removal of all the leadership of the commission by past and current presidents in the country. Nuhu Ribadu who was the pioneer chairman of the commission was removed in a controversial circumstance. His successor Farida Waziri was as well removed from office before the expiration of her tenure in office. She was subsequently replaced by Lamurde. He was accused of embezzling funds and was removed too. His successors Ibrahim Magu and Bawa were embroiled in scandalous circumstances and were removed before their tenure expired by the new presidents. Bawa was recently released from the custody of the Directorate of State Security Services (DSS). He was arrested by the DSS and was detained for several months without taking him to court.

*ii. Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC)*

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) was established in Nigeria in 2000 with the primary mandate to combat corruption within the public sector (Awopeju, 2015; Oni, 2021). It plays a crucial role in prosecuting corruption cases involving public sector officials and it is also tasked with responsibility of preventing corrupt practices through public education and awareness campaigns.

However, despite its noble objectives, the ICPC has faced numerous challenges that have affected its overall effectiveness. One of the most significant hurdles is its limited capacity and funding. Adequate resources are essential for conducting thorough investigations, hiring skilled personnel, and implementing comprehensive anti-corruption initiatives. The ICPC has struggled with budgetary constraints, which have hindered its ability to carry out its assigned mandate effectively. Moreover, the ICPC lacks certain powers that are available to other anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). For instance, it does not have the authority to seize assets obtained through corrupt practices. This limitation reduces its ability to exert influence and recover ill-gotten gains, which is a critical aspect of anti-corruption efforts.

Another area of concern is the ICPC's focus on combating corruption. While it has made efforts to address corrupt practices within the public sector, its emphasis has often been on lower-level graft, such as petty bribery and administrative misconduct, rather than high-profile abuses of office by top-ranking government officials. This perception has led to questions about the commission's effectiveness in holding powerful individuals accountable for corrupt practices.

### *iii. Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT)*

The Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) in Nigeria were established with a crucial mandate: to enforce asset disclosures and prosecute violations of the Code of Conduct for public officers. This framework is essential in upholding transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior among public officials. However, several factors have dulled their impact, raising concerns about the effectiveness of these institutions. One significant issue is the lack of public access to asset declarations. Asset disclosure is meant to be a mechanism for transparency, allowing citizens to scrutinise the wealth and financial interests of public officers. However, in practice, asset declarations are often kept confidential, limiting the ability of the public to hold officials accountable. The lack of transparency in this process undermines the intended purpose of asset disclosures and the public's trust in the system.

Severe delays in the prosecution of cases by the Code of Conduct Tribunal have also been a major challenge. The delayed prosecution of alleged violations can create an impression of impunity, as public officers may continue in their roles despite facing serious allegations. The slow legal process can erode confidence in the system's ability to deliver timely justice, making it less effective as a deterrent against misconduct.

Furthermore, there have been criticisms regarding an apparent reluctance to go after politically powerful figures. The perception of selective enforcement, where only certain individuals or groups are targeted, can undermine the credibility of the CCB and CCT. This can lead to suspicions of political bias and favoritism, which, in turn, can erode public trust in the institutions.

### **Challenges Confronting the Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria**

Despite the establishment of various anti-corruption agencies and the implementation of reform measures, several challenges continue to undermine the fight against corruption in Nigeria:

- 1. Political Interference:** Anti-corruption agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC often face undue political influence that limits their operational autonomy. Successive governments have used these agencies selectively, sometimes weaponising them against political opponents while shielding allies from prosecution.
- 2. Weak Judicial System:** The Nigerian judiciary struggles with issues of corruption, procedural delays, and limited capacity. High-profile corruption cases are frequently stalled due to legal loopholes, endless adjournments, and lack of prosecutorial will, resulting in a culture of impunity.
- 3. Inadequate Funding and Resources:** Anti-corruption agencies lack sufficient financial and human resources to conduct thorough investigations and enforce anti-graft measures effectively. Insufficient logistical support limits their ability to carry out their mandates.
- 4. Entrenched Patronage Networks:** Nigeria's political landscape is dominated by patronage and clientelism, where loyalty to political benefactors supersedes accountability to the public. These networks protect corrupt individuals and perpetuate systemic graft.

5. **Public Apathy and Distrust:** Years of high-profile scandals and unfulfilled anti-corruption promises have fostered public cynicism and apathy. Many citizens no longer believe that anti-corruption initiatives will yield meaningful results, leading to limited civic engagement.
6. **Complex Bureaucracy and Poor Record-Keeping:** The Nigerian public sector is characterised by cumbersome bureaucratic processes and inefficient record management, creating opportunities for corruption and obstructing transparency and accountability efforts.
7. **Weak Enforcement of Sanctions:** Even when corruption is detected, sanctions are often inconsistently applied or not enforced at all. The lack of credible consequences undermines deterrence and encourages continued corrupt practices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study on assessing the impact of anti-corruption reforms in Nigeria is underpinned by two key economic theories - Principal-Agent Theory and Game Theory. The Principal-Agent Theory is a fundamental framework in economics and political science that explores the dynamics of relationships where one party, the principal, delegates decision-making authority to another, the agent, with potentially divergent interests (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ravenswood, 2011).

In the context of governance, this theory is applied to analyse the relationship between citizens (principals) and elected officials (agents). Elected representatives are entrusted with making decisions on behalf of their constituents, but they may not always act in the best interests of the public. This theory helps to understand the challenges of accountability and the need for mechanisms, such as elections and oversight, to align the agent's behavior with the principal's preferences (Delves & Patrick, 2010; Fama & Jensen, 1983).

Principal-agent theory provides a useful conceptual lens for analysing the persistence of corruption in Nigeria. In the principal-agent model, the Nigerian people can be considered the principals who delegate authority over public resources and responsibilities to govern in the public interest to the politicians, officials and security figures who act as agents. However, an inherent information asymmetry arises where the agents have more knowledge about their specific actions in the office compared to the principals. This information asymmetry enables corruption to emerge when the government agents abuse their delegated power and insider knowledge for private gain against the interests of the Nigerian people as the principals. For instance, an agency head may award inflated contracts to companies and then receive kickbacks, or security officials may extort bribes at checkpoints, or a minister may misappropriate public funds - all instances where agents engage in graft hidden from public scrutiny.

The anti-corruption reforms instituted in Nigeria can be analysed through the principal-agent framework as ways to better align the incentives and interests of the political and bureaucratic agents with the Nigerian public as the principals. Principal-agent theory predicts that reducing information advantages exploited by agents along with reforming distorted incentive structures will curb corruption over time (Mugellini et al., 2021). The theory suggests anti-corruption reforms will work if they successfully rein in the temptation for illegal private gain by agents that comes with asymmetric information and powers. However, principal-agent theory also implies that reforms to curb corruption must be comprehensive and deep-rooted to overcome entrenched incentive patterns and not just lead to superficial compliance. Game theory is a foundational concept in economics and social sciences, which analyses strategic interactions among rational actors (Camerer, 2011). It provides a framework to

understand decision-making in situations where the outcome of one's choice depends on the choices of others. Originating with Von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944), it has since become a versatile tool in various fields. Game theory is applied in economics to model competition, in political science to study political choices and electoral campaigns. The Game theory also provides useful insights into why corruption has persisted as an equilibrium outcome in Nigeria.

Political corruption can be modeled as a coordination game in which officials pursue graft as a personally optimal strategy given how lucrative it is, despite the socially detrimental impacts on the country (Kingston, 2008). Corrupt practices arise because of the rewards, not the risks. However, game theory suggests it may be possible to shift the systemic equilibrium away from entrenched corruption if mechanisms change to make corruption riskier by increasing credible monitoring and robust punishment. If engagements in graft carried higher risks of detection and costs like prosecution and reputation damage, officials could rationally shift toward a fair governance strategy.

Applying principal-agent theory and game theory in tandem provides an integrated conceptual framework for diagnosing the causes of corruption and identifying reforms that could alter incentive structures to reduce graft. The theories generate premises on how reform outcomes are shaped by changing the risk-reward calculations of agents through enhanced accountability mechanisms, and by potentially shifting entrenched systemic equilibriums away from endemic corruption toward good governance. However, the theories also suggest that partial measures may fail to truly transform corruption incentives if reforms are not comprehensive enough. Officials' adept at playing the corruption 'game' may adapt to evade or co-opt reforms that do not radically change the calculus around risks versus rewards for engaging in graft. Deep transformations in formal and informal rules are likely needed to achieve lasting gains.

The application of principal-agent theory and game theory provides an insightful framework for the analysis of anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria. These microeconomic models help diagnose why graft has persisted, despite reform attempts. The theories illuminate how we must alter the risk-reward calculations of politicians and bureaucrats to curb corruption. While Principal-agent theory focuses on the need to give citizens more oversight power as principals, to detect abuses by their agents in government, Game theory shows how changing the equilibrium can make graft riskier and fairness more rewarding.

This means that the country must rigorously examine whether current reforms have bridged information gaps between citizens and the state, empowered oversight bodies with resources and autonomy, increased transparency around public funds, strengthened accountability through penalties, and removed loopholes that allow graft with impunity. By applying these models, this study gains clarity on the types and depth of reforms Nigeria needs to curb entrenched corruption. The path ahead requires moving beyond technical fixes to enact the far-reaching formal and informal changes that can engender accountability, transparency and integrity.

### **Methodology**

This study utilised a qualitative analysis of available secondary data from academic journals, news reports, and publications by government agencies and international organisations to assess the impact of anti-corruption measures in Nigeria. Specifically, peer-reviewed academic journals from reputable journals, Nigerian newspapers reports from leading publishers, reports from government organisations and publications by global organisations

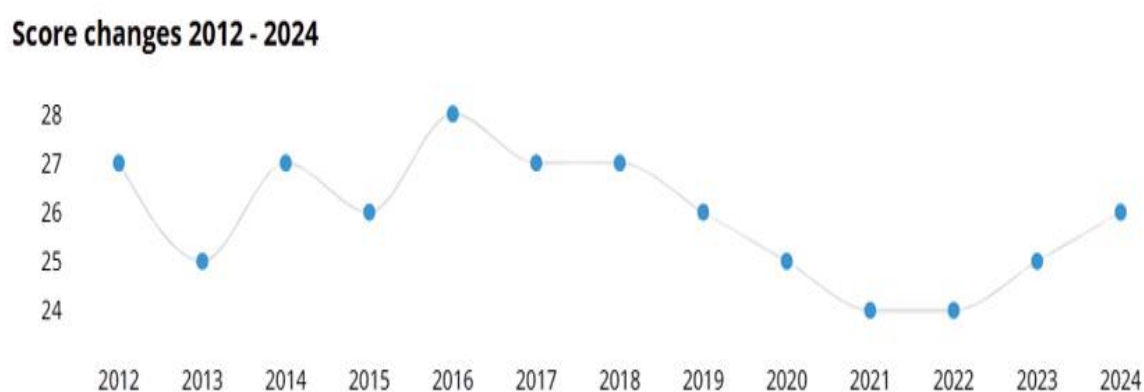
including Transparency International, AfroBarometer, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime gave comparative corruption metrics for Nigeria over time were all used for data sources. Content analysis methodology was applied to synthesise findings from these sources. By aggregating data, events, and perceptions from reputable journalistic, governmental, and international organisation accounts, the study aimed to thoroughly assess Nigeria's anti-graft outcomes.

### **Analysis and Discussions**

According to the Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index (2022), Nigeria's score has remained very low and relatively unchanged over the past two decades of supposed anti-corruption reforms, fluctuating between the 18-28 range out of 100 between 2000-2022 (TI, 2022). This indicates entrenched perceived corruption within the public sector despite years of rhetorical commitment and policy measures aimed at curbing graft. For perspective, scores below 30 are considered highly corrupt. The lack of significant improvement in Nigeria's score raises doubts about the efficacy and implementation of anti-corruption efforts thus far.

However, a somewhat rosier picture emerges from the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators. The specific indicator for control of corruption in Nigeria showed modest but steady improvements between 2000-2021 as shown in figure 1, with Nigeria's percentile rank rising up from below the 3rd percentile in 2000 to above the 10th percentile by 2021 (World Bank, 2022). This implies slight progress in the perceptions of citizens and experts regarding the scale of uncontrolled corruption in the country. The rank indicates Nigeria still rates in the bottom quartile globally, but international observers perceive gradual steps forward. The divergence between stagnating TI scores but rising WGI rankings merits further investigation to analyse the complex differences between corruption perceptions held by domestic Nigerian stakeholders versus international experts.

**Figure 1:**  
*Control of corruption index for Nigeria.*



*Source: Transparency International (2024)*

Also, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) survey data on experienced bribery rates showed an encouraging decrease from 32% of Nigerians reporting paying a bribe in the previous 12 months in 2021 down to 27% in 2021 (UNODC 2021). This implies tangible

reductions in petty corruption confronting ordinary citizens trying to access public services like healthcare, education, policing, and utilities. However, other data sources point to continued high-level corruption scourges in the 2010s. For instance, investigative journalistic reports revealed persistent scandals in the crucial oil and gas sector, including misconduct in Nigeria's oil subsidy program, opaque oil-for-product swap deals, and missing oil revenues (Okongwu & Imoisi, 2020). Contract fraud remained rampant, seen in inflated and phantom contracts across sectors like defense, highways, and telecoms (Oti, 2020). Payroll graft and employment racketeering thrived as well, with revelations of thousands of ghost workers on government payrolls (Abdulkareem et al., 2021).

The UNODC survey results showing declining administrative bribery rates indicate that Nigerian citizens experience less day-to-day petty corruption when trying to access basic public services like obtaining documentation, healthcare, school enrollment, and utilities. This likely reflects recent technocratic reforms aimed at improving service delivery, reducing cash payments, and increasing digitisation and e-governance. Initiatives such as the Bank Verification Number system, Treasury Single Account rollout, and online passport and driver's license applications have reduced the opportunities for bribery in regular citizen-state interactions (Abdulkareem et al., 2022). However, these localised improvements mask the persistence of systemic high-level corruption and financial mismanagement within the Nigerian public sector. Continuing exposés and scandals in sectors like oil, defense procurement, infrastructure contracting, and public payrolls indicate that entrenched political corruption remains pervasive and carried out with impunity among the elite (Komolafe et al., 2019; Okongwu & Imoisi, 2020).

Anti-corruption reforms have failed to sufficiently tackle the underlying drivers of graft and patronage politics, including distortions in the oil revenue management system, inflated contracts that enable kickbacks, and padding of public payrolls with ghost workers to enable payroll fraud (Enweremadu, 2019). These require directly confronting vested interests and reducing the excessive discretionary powers exercised by senior politicians, officials, and military leaders over public resources.

In essence, while statistical drops in petty bribery are encouraging, they primarily reflect superficial improvements in service delivery rather than robust anti-corruption reforms. Deep-seated grand corruption persists higher up Nigeria's political system and within complex bureaucracies like the NNPC and Ministry of Defense where reforms have shied away from upending existing incentives and procedures that enable graft. Sustainable anti-corruption progress requires moving beyond technocratic tinkering to enact fundamental structural changes that increase transparency and accountability across all levels of government.

On balance, several reports' data synthesised from various international sources paints a picture of modest gains in anti-corruption outcomes since Nigeria's return to democracy, but systemic and political corruption remains deeply entrenched. The slight improvements on metrics like the World Bank's control of corruption indicator and UNODC's bribery rates represent glimmers of progress resulting from targeted reforms and digitisation efforts. These technical fixes have improved service delivery and reduced opportunities for petty graft in citizen's everyday interactions with agents of the state.

However, persistent revelations of major corruption scandals across economic sectors, continuing low scores on Transparency International's index, and little change in Afrobarometer survey data on underlying corruption perceptions indicate substantial anti-

corruption work remains. The fundamentals enabling systemic graft - elite patronage networks, oil revenue mismanagement, bloated and opaque contracts, weak oversight institutions - remain largely intact. Sustainable progress in fighting corruption will require not just more technical or bureaucratic reforms but a fundamental shift in political incentives and cultural attitudes toward graft in Nigeria. As long as corrupt practices remain rewarded rather than punished, they will persist.

### **Implications for Peace and Security**

Nigeria's deeply entrenched corruption has far-reaching implications for the country's stability and risks catalysing multiple forms of conflict and unrest. With graft so pervasive at the highest levels, billions in stolen oil revenues and drained state coffers are lining the pockets of the political elite and their cronies. This grand corruption deprives the Nigerian treasury of funds desperately needed for public services, infrastructure development, job creation, and programs to lift millions out of poverty. The resulting widening inequality gap and lack of economic opportunities fuels strong grievances and anger, particularly among the youth, that can eventually boil over into protests, criminality, insurgency and violence against local elites and the Nigerian state. The ostentatious displays of wealth flaunted by politicians thought to be corrupt further infuriates many common Nigerians who feel abandoned and left behind by the leaders and institutions meant to serve the public good.

In Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region, the dramatic contrast between the wealth generated from oil and the abject poverty experienced by local communities fosters deep grievances. Massive pilfering of oil revenues by political elites while Delta residents lack even basic amenities and opportunities has stoked militancy, pipeline sabotage, and demands for a greater share of oil money. Systemic corruption also enables the financing of groups like Boko Haram. Money laundering, cattle rustling, and kickbacks on inflated arms contracts provide income streams to arm and supply insurgents. Within the military, corruption practices like payroll padding with "ghost soldiers" siphon off resources and undermine counterinsurgency capacities on the frontlines. At the local level, police officers demanding bribes rather than protecting law and order leaves citizens insecure.

Studies have found the perception of widespread graft erodes public trust and confidence in federal, state and local government bodies (Augustine & Enyi, 2020; Cha, 2023). When the nation's oil wealth and resources are siphoned off rather than invested equitably in roads, schools, health clinics, rural development and other public priorities, citizens lose faith in both elected officials and the government agencies meant to deliver services (Abdulkareem et al., 2021). Decades of corruption have engrained the perception among regular Nigerians that the country's political leaders care only about accumulating power and wealth for themselves, their cronies and regional networks - rather than governing with integrity for the benefit of the Nigerian people. When citizens believe their leaders are driven by self-enrichment rather than selfless public service, it profoundly corrodes public trust in government and the state's legitimacy. Surveys have found most Nigerians consider federal, state and local office holders to be "extremely corrupt". This broken social contract stems from the failure of public institutions to deliver good governance, security, services and economic opportunities equitably to Nigeria's population.

With corruption so pervasive, citizens have lost confidence that government agencies work in the interest of the people. This lack of trust and legitimacy creates fertile ground for various forms of social unrest and mass rebellion against authority. Frustration with corrupt leaders has catalysed protests movements, labour strikes, militant groups in the Delta, support for secessionists, and uprisings against perceived injustice. Some turn to ethnic militias and

vigilantes for security when the state fails to provide it. Also, if high-level corruption continues unchecked, calls mount for radical anti-corruption measures, even at the cost of democracy itself. Nigeria has a history of coups against corrupt regimes. The persisting lack of accountability could provoke authoritarian reactions that threaten Nigeria's fragile democracy. Survey data already indicates dwindling faith that democracy can deliver good governance if corruption is not controlled.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

After decades of rhetoric and piecemeal efforts, systemic corruption remains deeply entrenched in Nigeria, perpetuated by greedy elites who continue to enrich themselves at the expense of the Nigerian people. Half-hearted technocratic reforms have barely scratched the surface and failed to deliver accountability, as corruption scandals persist unabated. This analysis for this study reveals the urgent need for renewed political will to implement fundamental reforms that go beyond mere tinkering. Only by tackling the roots of corruption - distortion of incentives that reward graft, impunity for the powerful, illicit financing, and more - can Nigeria remedy the graft eating away at its institutions and social fabric.

The study recommends the followings:

1. To reset the nation's course, visionary leaders must champion reforms that empower reformers, strengthen watchdogs, increase transparency around public funds, hold the corrupt to account, and incentivise integrity. Weeding out kleptocrats and prosecuting grand corruption cases can help change the narrative. So can enlisting the media, civil society and external partners in monitoring and advocacy.
2. Similarly, citizens too must sustain pressure on leaders to deliver on anti-graft commitments. In the long run, Nigeria needs comprehensive reforms of the judiciary, security agencies, ballot integrity, and oil revenue management. Matching this institutional transformation with cultural change toward values of accountability and transparency will secure Nigeria's future.
3. The road ahead will be arduous. But Nigeria boasts dynamic citizens and resources that, if properly harnessed, can make the country a beacon of justice. With courageous action today, Nigeria can quell graft, spur development, inspire its youth, and realise lasting peace and prosperity for generations to come.
4. Far-reaching anti-corruption reforms are crucial to strengthen governance institutions, restore security and enable equitable economic development. With strong laws, systems and political commitment, Nigeria can still bend the arc of history away from instability and towards justice.
5. Therefore, to regain public trust and stability, Nigeria's government needs systemic reforms that root out graft and institute accountability. Leaders must convince citizens through action that they genuinely work for public welfare, not self-enrichment. Rebuilding faith in government's core role of equitable service delivery requires controlling corruption and restoring justice.
6. It is important for the government to empower the citizens by expanding and improving upon the human capital indices in education and citizens awareness. When the citizens are empowered, it will boost confidence in the government and further entrench the democratic polity of the country.
7. In the Nigerian society, government must adopt initiatives to increase knowledge of the detrimental effects of corruption and thereafter promote ethical principles. This can be accomplished through promoting accountability and openness in public institutions, incorporating anti-corruption themes into school curricula, and launching educational campaigns.

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