AN APPRAISAL OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION ON NIGERIA'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.

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CERTIFICATION

I, **AJAYI FUNMILAYO (PG/LAW2110395)** hereby certify that, apart from reference to works of other scholars which have been duely acknowleged herein, this entire study is a product of my personal research and it has neither in whole or part been presented for another degree elsewhere.

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APPROVAL

We certify that this project work was written and completed by **Funmilayo Ajayi (PG/LAW2110395)** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Master of Law (LL.M) Degree of the University of Benin.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the resilient people of Nigeria, whose unwavering hope and pursuit of a just society continue to inspire the struggle for accountable leadership and transparent governance.

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4. Federal Republic of Nigeria v. James Ibori, [2012] EWCA Crim 2092 (UK).
5. Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Yahaya Bello, Unreported (High Ct. of the FCT, pending).
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4. Electoral Act, 2022.
5. Freedom of Information Act, 2011.
6. Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission Act, 2000.
7. Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act, Cap. C15, LFN 2004.

B. Foreign

8. United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), 2003. (Ratified by Nigeria in 2004).
9. African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC), 2003. (Ratified by Nigeria in 2006).
10. ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption, 2001.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. AML: Anti-Money Laundering
2. APRM: African Peer Review Mechanism
3. AU: African Union
4. AUCPCC: African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption
5. BVAS: Bimodal Voter Accreditation System
6. CCB: Code of Conduct Bureau
7. CCT: Code of Conduct Tribunal
8. CTF: Counter-Terrorist Financing
9. ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States
10. EFCC: Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
11. FATF: Financial Action Task Force
12. FDI: Foreign Direct Investment
13. GDP: Gross Domestic Product
14. GIABA: Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa
15. ICPC: Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission
16. IMF: International Monetary Fund
17. INEC: Independent National Electoral Commission
18. IReV: INEC Result Viewing Portal
19. NNPC: Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (now Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited, NNPCL)
20. OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

21. PEP: Politically Exposed Person
22. SMEs: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
23. UNCAC: United Nations Convention Against Corruption
24. UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
25. UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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Abstract

Political corruption stands as the most formidable and deeply ingrained barrier to Nigeria's progress, persistently undermining economic stability, eroding public trust, and crippling institutional development since independence. This study aims to critically evaluate the devastating impact of this scourge on national development by examining its historical roots, socio-political manifestations, and economic consequences, while also assessing the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional frameworks. Employing a doctrinal research methodology enriched with historical analysis and comparative insights from successful models like Singapore and Rwanda, the research reveals that corruption in Nigeria is not merely incidental but a systemic feature enabled by weak institutions, political interference, and a pervasive culture of impunity. Key findings highlight the ineffectiveness of agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC due to partisan influence and operational constraints, as well as the complicity of the judiciary and electoral bodies in perpetuating corruption. In response, the study urges comprehensive reforms including ensuring the autonomy of anti-corruption bodies, enacting stringent campaign finance laws, establishing specialized courts for corruption cases, and leveraging technology for greater transparency, ultimately emphasizing that sustainable change depends on genuine political will and an engaged civil society to foster a culture of accountability and transform Nigeria's governance landscape.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Political corruption has consistently been one of the most profound obstacles to Nigeria's progress and development since its independence in 1960.[1] The widespread nature of corruption, particularly within the political sphere, has undermined governance, economic stability, and public confidence in State institutions.[2] Despite being richly endowed with both natural and human resources, Nigeria continues to struggle with pervasive poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and weak institutions due to the corrosive influence of corruption.[3] Scholars and policy analysts have long contended that corruption distorts policymaking, weakens democratic structures, and exacerbates social inequality, making it a central issue in governance and legal reform.[4] The consequences of corruption are evident across all levels of governance, manifesting in mismanagement of public funds, electoral fraud, nepotism, and a general breakdown of accountability. Over the years, political corruption has transformed from an issue of individual misconduct into a deeply entrenched systemic problem in Nigeria's socio-political landscape.[5]

Historically, corruption in Nigeria has its roots in colonial and post-colonial political systems. During British colonial rule, the governance model was largely characterised by indirect

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1 G. S. O. Igiebor, Political Corruption in Nigeria: Implications for Economic Development in the Fourth Republic, *Journal of Developing Societies* [2019] 35(4) 493–513.

2 J. O. Adebayo, *Political Corruption and Governance in Nigeria* (Supreme Press, 2019) 32.

3 M. O. Yusuf, "The Impact of Corruption on Economic Growth in Nigeria" *Nigerian Journal of Public Administration* [2020] 45(3) 67.

4 O. C. Uche, *The Political Economy of Colonial Rule in Nigeria* (Heritage Publishers, 2018) 55.

5 O. J. Otusanya and S. G. Lauwo, Corruption and socio-political economic structures: A Case of Nigeria, *Journal of Financial Crime* [2019] 26(1) 330–371.

rule and patronage networks, which set the foundation for corrupt practices after independence.[6] The colonial administration relied on a structure that empowered local chiefs and traditional rulers, who often abused their authority for personal gain. This legacy of unchecked power and lack of transparency persisted after Nigeria's independence, as political elites inherited a governance framework that lacked robust accountability mechanisms.[7] The First Republic (1960–1966) was marked by electoral malpractices, political patronage, and financial mismanagement, ultimately leading to the military coup of 1966.[8] Subsequent military regimes institutionalised corruption, with governance dominated by authoritarian rule, lack of transparency, and large-scale embezzlement of public funds. The oil boom of the 1970s presented an opportunity for economic advancement, but rather than investing in national development, political leaders misappropriated oil revenues for personal enrichment, resulting in economic mismanagement and inefficiency in public administration.[9]

The ramifications of political corruption extend across economic growth, governance, and social development. One of the most visible effects is the misallocation of public resources, whereby funds intended for infrastructure, healthcare, and education are diverted for private use.[10] According to the World Bank, corruption remains a primary factor behind Nigeria's slow economic growth, despite its vast oil reserves.[11] In a corrupt economic environment, investors are often discouraged due to policy instability and regulatory uncertainty, resulting in capital flight and a decline in foreign direct investment (FDI). Transparency International's Corruption

6 B. Ajayi, "Electoral Malpractices in the First Republic" *Journal of African Politics* [2017] 20(1) 89.
7 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act 2004 (Nigeria), s. 4.
8 Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2023* (TI, 2023) <www.transparency.org/cpi> accessed 5 March 2025.
9 World Bank, *Nigeria Development Report* [2021] 112.
10 M. S. Adekunle, "Corruption and Foreign Investment in Nigeria" *African Economic Review* [2019] 14(2) 205.
11 Ibid

Perceptions Index consistently ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt nations worldwide, underscoring how corruption obstructs business activities, investment flows, and national development.[12]

Beyond economic stagnation, corruption erodes democratic institutions and governance structures. It undermines the rule of law and diminishes public trust in democratic governance. Political leaders frequently manipulate the judiciary and law enforcement agencies to shield themselves from legal consequences, fostering a culture of impunity[13]. This has resulted in weak accountability systems, where corrupt politicians and public officials engage in financial misconduct without fear of prosecution.[14] Even the judiciary, which is meant to act as an independent check on executive and legislative excesses, has not been spared from corruption, as some Judges and legal practitioners have been implicated in bribery scandals.[15] When judicial integrity is compromised, it becomes increasingly difficult to enforce anti-corruption laws effectively, creating an environment in which corruption flourishes without consequences.

Successive Nigerian governments have attempted to combat corruption through legal and institutional measures. The creation of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) marked significant steps towards tackling political corruption.[16] These agencies have played crucial roles in prosecuting high-profile corruption cases, yet their overall effectiveness has been hindered by political interference and weak enforcement mechanisms.[17] Many corruption cases remain

12 O. E. Chinedu, *Judicial Corruption and the Rule of Law in Nigeria* (Royal Publications, 2020) 78.
13 United Nations Convention Against Corruption, 2003, Article 5.
14 A. Danjuma, "Selective Anti-Corruption Campaigns in Nigeria" *Journal of Legal Studies* [2022] 27(4) 143.
15 Ojeka, S., Adegboye, A., Adegboye, K., Umukoro, O., Dahunsi, O., & Ozordi, E., Corruption Perception, Institutional Quality and Performance of listed Companies in Nigeria, Heliyon, 5(10), 2019.
16 S. L. Okafor, *Media and Anti-Corruption Efforts in Nigeria* (Nigerian Press Institute, 2021) 92.
17 A. Bello, "The Judiciary and the Fight Against Corruption" *Nigerian Law Review* (2021) 10(2) 233.

unresolved due to the influence of powerful political figures, who exploit legal loopholes to evade justice. Furthermore, concerns have been raised regarding selective prosecution, where anti-corruption agencies focus on opposition figures while overlooking corruption within the ruling party**.** Such practices diminish public confidence in anti-corruption initiatives, reinforcing the belief that these efforts serve political rather than governance objectives.

To portray the nation's determination to curb public corruption, Nigeria had acceded to several anti-corruption treaties, including the *United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC)* and the *African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC)*.[18] These agreements provide a framework for strengthening Nigeria's anti-corruption policies, yet enforcement remains inconsistent.[19] While Nigeria has committed to these international conventions, the implementation of anti-corruption measures remains superficial, with little impact on reducing systemic corruption[20]**.** The success of anti-corruption initiatives largely depends on political will and institutional autonomy, which have fluctuated across different administrations.[21] While some administrations, such as the Buhari administration (2015–2023), prioritised anti-corruption efforts, criticisms of political bias and selective justice undermined their credibility.[22] The continued failure to effectively prosecute politically exposed persons (PEPs) has led to public disillusionment and scepticism regarding the sincerity of anti-corruption campaigns.[23] Unless Nigeria adopts a comprehensive and impartial approach to

18 African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC), 2003, Article 7.
19 Ibid
20 Obamuyi, T.M. & Olayiwola, S. O., corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria, *Journal of Economics and Management,* [2019] (35) 94.
21 A. Raji, *The Buhari Anti-Corruption Agenda: A Critical Review* (Unity Press, 2022) 134.
22 A. Raji, (note 22) 134.
23 G. A. Yusuf, "Challenges in Enforcing Anti-Corruption Laws in Nigeria" *African Journal of Legal Studies* [2021] 31(1) 89.

combating corruption, the nation risks perpetuating a cycle of ineffective governance, economic stagnation, and weakened institutions.

The role of civil society organisations, the media, and international bodies in exposing corruption and holding public officials accountable is indispensable.[24] Investigative journalism and whistleblowing mechanisms have played a pivotal role in uncovering major corruption scandals in Nigeria, such as the oil subsidy fraud and the Malabu oil scandal.[25] Strengthening these oversight mechanisms and ensuring judicial independence are vital steps towards achieving meaningful anti-corruption reforms.[26] A free and independent press is essential in exposing corruption and ensuring transparency in governance. However, journalists and whistleblowers in Nigeria frequently face threats, harassment, and intimidation, which limits their ability to report corruption effectively. To create an enabling environment for anti-corruption efforts, the government must ensure the protection of journalists and civil society activists, as their role is critical in promoting accountability.

Political corruption remains one of the greatest barriers to Nigeria's development. Despite the existence of legal frameworks and anti-corruption agencies, the persistence of corrupt practices within the political class has obstructed progress in governance, economic stability, and institutional development. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach, encompassing legal reforms, institutional strengthening, and public awareness initiatives. The effectiveness of Nigeria's fight against corruption will ultimately depend on political commitment, judicial

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24 B. N. Chukwuemeka, *Civil Society and the Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria* (New Dawn Publishers, 2020) 156.

25 P. Okonkwo, "The Role of Investigative Journalism in Exposing Corruption in Nigeria" *Journal of Media and Governance* [2022] 18(3) 97.

26 C. Nwankwo, *The Whistleblower Policy and Its Impact on Anti-Corruption Efforts in Nigeria* (Gold Standard Publications, 2021) 64.

independence, and active civil society engagement in demanding accountability.[27] The long-term success of anti-corruption measures will be determined by the government's ability to enforce the rule of law, enhance transparency in governance, and cultivate a culture of accountability among public officials. Without these fundamental changes, Nigeria's development will continue to be undermined by the damaging effects of political corruption.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Political corruption in Nigeria has become deeply entrenched, permeating nearly every aspect of governance, economic progress, and societal development.[28] Despite the establishment of various anti-corruption initiatives, legal frameworks, and institutions aimed at addressing corruption, the country continues to grapple with widespread and systemic corruption, particularly within the political class.[29] Corruption in governance manifests in embezzlement of public funds, electoral fraud and malpractices, nepotism, bribery, and abuse of power, all of which have contributed to economic stagnation, poor infrastructure, and a decline in public trust in government institutions[30].

One of the most critical issues is the misappropriation of public funds intended for economic and social development. As one of the world's leading oil producers, Nigeria generates revenue from crude oil exports, yet the country continues to experience deteriorating healthcare system, a failing educational system, and inadequate infrastructure.[31] Reports from the World Bank and Transparency International consistently rank Nigeria among the most corrupt nations

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27 K. Olufemi, "Public Accountability and the Future of Anti-Corruption in Nigeria" *Nigerian Public Policy Review* [2023] 12(1) 112.

28 J. O. Adebayo, *The Impact of Corruption on Governance in Nigeria* (Supreme Press, 2022) 45.

29 Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2023* <www.transparency.org/cpi> accessed 5 March 2025.

30 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act 2004 (Nigeria), s. 4.

31 World Bank, *Nigeria Development Report 2023* (World Bank, 2023) 97.

globally, identifying mismanagement of public funds as a major impediment to sustainable development.[32] Additionally, corruption has negatively impacted foreign investment, as international investors perceive Nigeria's business environment as unpredictable due to bribery, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of transparency.[33] The diversion of public funds has further exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, widening the gap between the wealthy elite and the impoverished majority, leading to high levels of unemployment and poverty.[34]

1.3 Research Questions

The persistence of political corruption raises several critical questions that this research seeks to address:

1. What are the historical and socio-political factors that have contributed to the emergence and evolution of political corruption in Nigeria since independence?
2. How does political corruption impact Nigeria's economic growth, governance, and public sector development?
3. What are the key challenges faced by anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in the fight against political corruption?
4. How does electoral malpractice contribute to the perpetuation of political corruption?
5. What policy reforms and legal mechanisms can be implemented to strengthen Nigeria's fight against political corruption?

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32 Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer: Africa 2022* (TI, 2022) <www.transparency.org/gcb> accessed 5 March 2025.

33 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Corruption and Its Impact on Foreign Direct Investment in West Africa* (Vienna: UNODC, 2021) 112.

34 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), *Poverty and Unemployment Report in Nigeria* (NBS, 2023) 78.

1.4 Aim and Objective of the Study

The study aims to critically appraise the impact of political corruption on Nigeria's growth and development. The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the historical background and socio-political context of political corruption in Nigeria, highlighting its root causes and evolution;
2. To examine the extent to which political corruption affects economic growth, governance, and public administration in Nigeria;
3. To identify the challenges faced by anti-corruption agencies, including political interference, lack of funding, and selective prosecution, which limit their effectiveness;
4. To investigate the link between electoral corruption and political corruption; and,
5. To recommend legal, policy, and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria and promoting good governance.

1.5 Justification of The Study

Political corruption remains a formidable barrier to Nigeria's sustainable development, public sector credibility, and institutional strength. Despite various legal reforms, structural administrative changes, and international partnerships aimed at addressing the issue, corruption has not only endured but, in many cases, become more entrenched and sophisticated.

The study is particularly relevant because it seeks to explore why corruption continues to flourish, despite the presence of numerous anti-corruption mechanisms. By examining Nigeria's political history, from colonial administration to the current democratic dispensation, it aims to uncover the structural and cultural foundations that sustain corrupt practices.

In the light of Nigeria's ongoing development challenges, the research becomes even more urgent. Corruption cuts across virtually all sectors of governance, undermining public procurement processes, infrastructure delivery, judicial outcomes, and electoral processes. It diverts crucial public funds away from vital sectors such as health, education, and national security. As such, an exploration of the political and institutional mechanisms that fuel corruption is vital for implementing meaningful reform.

For policymakers, the study offers evidence-based insights that can shape more effective and contextually appropriate anti-corruption strategies. By identifying the systemic institutional failures and political structures that encourage corruption, the research can support the formulation of targeted policy responses. Frequently, anti-corruption frameworks collapse not because of legal inadequacies, but due to political inertia and the manipulation of oversight bodies by the very elites they are intended to check. The study advocates a comprehensive approach, one that goes beyond punitive measures to also confront underlying social norms, institutional deficiencies, and elite dominance.

1.6 Scope of The Study

The study investigates political corruption in Nigeria, with a primary emphasis on its underlying causes, various expressions, and its consequences for national development. It explores multiple dimensions of political corruption committed by public officials, including bribery, embezzlement, electoral malpractice, nepotism, and the misuse of authority for personal or party benefit. The study also assesses the performance of Nigeria's key legal and institutional anti-corruption mechanisms, specifically the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), and the judiciary. In addition, the study examines Nigeria's adherence to major international anti-corruption frameworks, notably the *United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC)* and the *African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC).*

The study centres on the Nigerian context, acknowledging that while corruption is a global concern, the country's experience is influenced by unique socio-political dynamics, institutional weaknesses, and a legacy of poor governance. Comparative insights from other African nations or global experiences may be referenced where they offer relevant perspectives or reform models.

The timeframe for the study is from 1999 to the present, coinciding with the establishment of Nigeria's Fourth Republic and a shift to democratic governance. This period is particularly significant due to the formation of new anti-corruption institutions and heightened reform efforts. The study pays particular attention to notable corruption cases, policy changes, and institutional developments that have taken place under successive civilian administrations.

The study is limited to public corruption, except in cases where it overlaps with political corruption, such as political financing, contract awards, or laundering of public funds through politically exposed persons (PEPs). The focus remains on political corruption at the federal level, which has exerted the most influence on national governance, though references to state and local incidents may be included where they provide broader insight. The study remains within the legal and institutional dimensions of corruption, without delving deeply into economic, sociological, or psychological analyses, except where such perspectives are necessary to support legal argumentation.

1.7 Research Methodology

This research employs a rigorous doctrinal legal research methodology, which represents the established and primary approach for scholarly inquiry within the field of law. As a library-based research method, it facilitates a structured and critical examination of legal rules, principles, and statutes to develop a coherent and analytical understanding of the subject matter. The process entailed a systematic investigation into a wide array of authoritative legal sources, beginning with a thorough analysis of primary materials. These included the foundational Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended, alongside pivotal legislation such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act, the Independent Corrupt Practices Act, and the Electoral Act 2022, supplemented by an examination of relevant Nigerian case law that has influenced the jurisprudential landscape on corruption and governance.

To anchor this legal analysis within a robust theoretical and practical context, the study integrated an extensive review of secondary sources, encompassing scholarly articles, authoritative textbooks, and reports from international organizations like the World Bank and Transparency International. Furthermore, the doctrinal approach was enhanced through a historical analysis that traced the persistent evolution of political corruption from the colonial period through various military regimes to the contemporary democratic era, illuminating the deeply entrenched nature of the issue. Additionally, a comparative analysis was incorporated, drawing instructive insights from the successful anti-corruption frameworks of nations such as Singapore and Rwanda, thereby providing valuable external benchmarks and potential models for systemic reform. This multifaceted methodological framework was selected for its capacity to enable a comprehensive evaluation of the legal and institutional mechanisms designed to combat political corruption in Nigeria, assessing not only the statutory provisions but also their practical implementation, judicial interpretation, and overall effectiveness within the nation's unique socio-political context.

1.8 Analysis Of Chapters

This dissertation is structured into five distinct yet interconnected chapters, each designed to systematically build upon the previous to provide a comprehensive analysis of political corruption in Nigeria, its impacts, and the legal-institutional response.

Chapter One: Introduction

The foundational chapter establishes the research premise by delineating the profound and pervasive problem of political corruption as the central impediment to Nigeria's development. It provides essential background, contextualizing the issue within Nigeria's historical trajectory from colonialism to the present Fourth Republic and highlighting the gap between existing anti-corruption mechanisms and their demonstrable ineffectiveness. Furthermore, it precisely defines the scope of the research, limiting its focus to political corruption at the federal level from 1999 onwards, and outlines the doctrinal legal research methodology to be employed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter serves as the scholarly backbone of the dissertation. It engages in a thorough conceptual analysis, dissecting the meanings of corruption and political corruption from legal, economic, and political perspectives. It meticulously traces the historical development and evolution of the phenomenon in Nigeria, identifying its systemic nature and key characteristics such as institutional capture and impunity. The chapter's major contribution lies in its application of three robust theoretical frameworks, Principal-Agent Theory, Rent-Seeking Theory, and Institutional Theory, to explain the mechanisms that drive and sustain corrupt practices. By synthesizing a wide body of existing literature, this chapter effectively positions the study within ongoing academic discourses and provides the theoretical lenses through which the subsequent analysis is conducted.

Chapter Three: Impact of Political Corruption on Nigeria's Growth and Development

As the core analytical component, this chapter delivers a critical and empirical assessment of the multifarious consequences of corruption. It moves beyond a mere cataloguing of effects to provide a deep analysis of how corruption cripples economic progress through infrastructure decay, a hostile investment climate, and macroeconomic instability. It convincingly argues how corruption sabotages public service delivery and human capital development, exacerbates poverty, and entrenches socio-economic and regional inequalities. The chapter is particularly potent in its use of high-profile case studies (e.g., the fuel subsidy scam) to ground its analysis in tangible, real-world examples of grand corruption, thereby moving from abstract theory to concrete impact.

Chapter Four: Examination of Legal and Institutional Frameworks

This chapter shifts the focus from diagnosing the problem to evaluating the prescribed remedies. It offers a critical appraisal of the plethora of legal instruments and institutions established to combat corruption, both internationally (UNCAC, AUCPCC) and domestically (EFCC, ICPC, CCB, INEC, Judiciary). The analysis is not merely descriptive but analytical, pinpointing the critical deficiencies that render these frameworks ineffective, including political interference, lack of autonomy, jurisdictional overlaps, and selective enforcement. The comparative analysis with the successful anti-corruption models of Singapore and Rwanda provides a crucial external benchmark, highlighting the stark contrast in political will and institutional integrity and offering valuable lessons for Nigeria. The chapter concludes that the existing frameworks, while extensive on paper, are fundamentally compromised in practice.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter synthesizes the entire study, consolidating the key findings from all preceding chapters to present a cohesive and powerful conclusion: that political corruption in Nigeria is a deeply entrenched systemic failure. It successfully answers the research questions posed at the outset, with recommendations, ranging from ensuring institutional independence and judicial reform to campaign finance regulation and civic empowerment, are directly derived from the findings and are presented as an integrated strategy for transformative change, emphasizing the indispensable role of political will and public accountability.

Each chapter fulfills a distinct purpose, contributing to a comprehensive and persuasive academic argument.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Analysis of Corruption

2.1.1 Meaning of Corruption

Corruption is a term that everyone seems to recognize, yet it is surprisingly tricky to pin down with a single definition, as there is no universally acceptable definition of the term.[35] At its core, it is about misusing the power that has been entrusted to someone, all for personal gain.[36] This issue can be viewed through various lenses, legal, economic, and political, and it manifests in different ways, often fueled by weak institutions and deeply rooted societal habits.[37]

Legally speaking, corruption encompasses actions that are considered illegal or unethical, especially when carried out by public officials who exploit their roles for personal gain.[38] This includes acts such as; bribery, embezzlement, undue influence, and nepotism, practices that usually violate both criminal laws and ethical guidelines.[39] In Nigeria, laws like the *Criminal Code,*[40] *the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act,*[41] *and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act*[42] outlaw these

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54 Obamuyi, T.M. & Olayiwola, S. O., corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria, *Journal of Economics and Management,* [2019] (35) 82.

55 G. S. O. Igiebor, Political Corruption in Nigeria: Implications for Economic Development in the Fourth Republic, *Journal of Developing Societies* [2019] 35(4) 495.

56 O. J. Otusanya and S. G. Lauwo, Corruption and socio-political economic structures: A Case of Nigeria, *Journal of Financial Crime* [2019] 26(1) 330–371 330–333.

57 Olujobi, O. J and S.G Lauwo, Corruption and socio-political economic structures: A case of Nigeria, Journal of Financial Crime [2019] 26 (1) 1–4.

58 Ibid

40 Cap Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2010.

41 Cap 44 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2010.

42 ICPC Act 2000.

behaviours. However, putting these laws into action is often a challenge due to fragile institutions and significant political meddling.[43]

From an economic standpoint, corruption throws a wrench in the works of markets, stifles fair competition, and hampers productivity by creating unnecessary obstacles and promoting rent-seeking behavior.[44] It leads to a misallocation of resources, bloated government spending, and a drop in investor confidence. All of these factors together stifle economic growth and exacerbate poverty.[45] Additionally, corruption can lead to macroeconomic instability by undermining institutions, skewing policy decisions, and enabling capital flight.[46]

Corruption has a way of eating away democratic ideals, shaking public trust in government, and stirring up political instability.[47] It skews democratic processes through tactics like vote buying, favoritism, and the clever manipulation of policies for personal or party gain.[48] Otusanya and Lauwo note that in Nigeria, corruption is woven into the fabric of the socio-political landscape and is often accepted or even institutionalized among the political elite.[49]

On a global scale, international organizations have offered definitions that help frame corruption in a wider context. For instance, Transparency International describes corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain," which includes both grand and petty corruption in political and

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[62] Olujobi, O. J., "Nigeria's Upstream Petroleum Industry Anti-Corruption Legal Framework: The Necessity for Overhauling and Enrichment" [2023] 26(7) *Journal of Money Laundering Control* 1, 3.

[63] Obamuyi, T. M. and Olayiwola, S. O., (note 54) 85.

[64] Igiebor, G. S. O. (note 55) 493, 495.

[65] Obamuyi, T. M.and Olayiwola, S. O., (note 54) 80, 87.

[66] Okunola, M. O., Umaru, A. and Hassan, S. I., Manifestations and Impacts of Corruption on Democratic Governance in Nigeria*, International Journal of Development and Management Review*, [2019] (14) (1) 170.

[67] Okunlola, O. C., "Political Regime Types and Economic Development in Nigeria: Significance of Conflict and Corruption" *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* [2019] 31(2) 183, 190.

[68] Otusanya, O. J. (note 56) 330, 334.

bureaucratic arenas.[50] The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) identifies corruption as actions like bribery, embezzlement, trading in influence, and abuse of function, especially when these acts are committed by public officials.[51] The World Bank sees corruption as "the abuse of public office for private gain," which highlights the negative impact on development and the misallocation of public resources.[52]

These definitions together emphasize that corruption is not just a legal issue; it is a deeply entrenched socio-political and economic challenge that hinders sustainable development, weakens institutional structures, and erodes public accountability.[53] In Nigeria, this problem is particularly severe, as corruption thrives not only because of individual greed but also due to weak institutions, political collusion, and a long-standing culture of impunity.[54]

2.1.2 Political Corruption

Political corruption is a unique form of corruption that specifically takes place in the political arena. It involves government officials misusing their authority, influence, or public office to gain personal, group, or party benefits.[55] While corruption in general includes unethical or illegal activities like bribery, fraud, and embezzlement across both public and private sectors, political corruption is more focused on politicians, political institutions, and the decision-making

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69 Transparency International, "What is Corruption?" https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption accessed 20 May 2025

70 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "United Nations Convention against Corruption" https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption accessed 20 May 2025.

71 World Bank, "Helping Countries Combat Corruption: The Role of the World Bank" https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance/brief/anti-corruption accessed 20May 2025.

72 Hope, K. R. Sr., The Corruption and Sustainable Development Nexus in Africa: A Contemporary Review and Analysis *Journal of Financial Crime* [2024] 31(2) 331.

73 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., and Eneiga, R. U., "Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies for Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust" *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* [2024] 8(1) 1, 5.

74 Igiebor G.S.O (note 55) 493.

processes involved.[56] This type of corruption is particularly damaging because it can erode democratic legitimacy, destabilize governance structures, and skew policymaking for selfish ends.

At its core, political corruption is about the intentional manipulation of laws, policies, institutions, or electoral processes by those in power, often to amass wealth or strengthen their political grip.[57] It can show up in various forms, such as political and electoral malpractices that manifests through vote buying, lack of transparency and credibility in the electoral process, inflated contracts, patronage appointments, bribing lawmakers, and misusing discretionary powers.[58] These actions are not just bureaucratic mistakes; they represent serious violations of the democratic contract and ethical governance. Often, political corruption mirrors and exacerbates institutional weaknesses, allowing elites to seize control and obstruct inclusive development.[59]

Political corruption tends to thrive in environments where transparency is minimal, accountability is weak, and institutional checks are ineffective. In Nigeria, these issues are made worse by deep-seated challenges like ethnic favoritism, clientelist networks, and ineffective oversight mechanisms.[60] Otusanya and Lauwo remark that the political landscape in Nigeria has been shaped by long-standing historical and structural factors that have normalized corruption, especially among those in power.[61] Public officials often misappropriate State funds, amass

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75 Folarin, S., "Corruption, Politics and Governance in Nigeria." In O. O. Olagunju and A. Adebanjo (eds), Nigerian Politics (Ibadan University Press, 2021) 377.

76 Otusanya, O. J. and Lauwo, S. G., Corruption and socio-political economic structures: A case of Nigeria *Journal of Financial Crime* [2019] 26(1) 330.

58 Ibid

78 Augustine, A. A. and Enyi, E. P., "Control of Corruption, Trust in Government, and Voluntary Tax Compliance in South-West, Nigeria" *Management Studies* [2020] 8(1) 84, 88.

79 Igiebor, G. S. O., (note 55) 493, 495..

61 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 56) 333.

illegal wealth, or manipulate procurement processes to benefit themselves or their political allies.[62]

This type of corruption can be found in both democratic and autocratic systems. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which operates within a democratic framework, political corruption often manifests as electoral fraud, misuse of State resources during election campaigns, and the undermining of regulatory bodies meant to ensure good governance.[63] High-profile scandals like the Halliburton bribery case, the recovery of the Abacha loot, and the convictions of former governors illustrate how political positions have been exploited for personal gain.[64]

On the other hand, in authoritarian regimes, political corruption is usually more centralized. Power is held tightly by a dominant leader or party, allowing them to manipulate institutions, control national resources, and suppress dissent without facing significant opposition or accountability.[65] These regimes may create the illusion of governance while directing State wealth to a privileged few.[66]

The prominent role of public officials in engaging in political corruption underscores the violation of public trust and the weakening of State legitimacy. While private sector corruption typically affects business ethics and economic fairness, political corruption more directly erodes democratic development, institutional resilience, and the rule of law.[67] Igiebor rightly describes political corruption as a "developmental cancer" that hampers economic growth, deepens

81 Ojogiwa, O. T., "The Crux of Strategic Leadership for a Transformed Public Sector Management in Nigeria" *International Journal of Business and Management Studies* [2021] 13(1) 83, 89.
82 Okunlola, O. C., (note 67) 183, 192.
83 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., and Eneiga, R. U., "Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies for Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust" (2024) 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1, 5.
84 Hope, Sr, K. R., 'The Corruption and Sustainable Development Nexus in Africa: A Contemporary Review and Analysis' *Journal of Financial Crime* [2024] 31(2) 331.
85 Adagbabiri, M. M. and Okolie, U. C., 'Corruption and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic' *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research* [2018] 4(3) 41, 45.
86 Olujobi, O. J., (note 62) 1, 4.

inequality, and stifles political participation, particularly in transitional or fragile democracies like Nigeria.[68]

2.1.3 Development of Political Corruption

The growth and persistence of political corruption are deeply rooted in the historical, institutional, and socio-political development of states, both at the global level and within Nigeria. While corrupt practices have been evident in various forms across different civilisations, ranging from the bureaucratic empires of ancient China to the aristocratic regimes of pre-revolutionary Europe, modern political corruption has become increasingly systematised.[69] It is often closely associated with centralised authority, inadequate legal oversight, and entrenched patron-client relations.[70]

Internationally, the emergence of political corruption is frequently attributed to the formation of nation-states, colonial governance, and the expansion of bureaucratic systems, wherein colonial administrations constructed rigid hierarchies that prioritised allegiance and loyalty over public accountability.[71] In many post-colonial nations such as Nigeria, these structures endured well beyond independence. The governance models introduced by colonial rulers not only excluded indigenous voices but also legitimised systems of economic exploitation and political exclusion, thereby laying the groundwork for systemic political corruption in the post-independence era.[72]

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87 Igiebor, (note 55) 494.
88 Ibid
89 Mlambo, D.N and others, 'Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa' (2019) 11(1) *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 39, 40.
90 Williams-Elegbe, S., 'Systemic Corruption and Public Procurement in Developing Countries: Are There Any Solutions?' *Journal of Public Procurement* [2018] 18(2) 131, 134.
91 Folarin, S., (Note 75) 381.

In the Nigerian context, the roots of political corruption can be traced back to the colonial period, particularly under British rule, where indirect governance through traditional leaders created networks of patronage that rewarded loyalty and discouraged transparent administration.[73] The colonial economy focused heavily on resource extraction and tax enforcement, with minimal concern for citizen accountability or participatory governance. This disconnect between authority and public responsibility persisted after independence, shaping Nigeria's post-colonial political landscape.[74]

Following independence, particularly during the First Republic (1960–1966), political corruption began to manifest more visibly through regional rivalries, ethnic politics, and clientelism.[75] The period witnessed widespread electoral fraud, manipulation of census data, and financial scandals, such as the African Continental Bank affair linked to Nnamdi Azikiwe.[76] These events marked the early institutionalisation of political corruption as part of political competition.

The advent of military rule between 1966 and 1979 and later 1983 and 1999 intensified corruption, as military regimes dismantled democratic structures and replaced them with centralised command systems that lacked transparency.[77] Although some military governments initially claimed to seek reform, they often became vehicles for large-scale embezzlement, shadow budgeting, and repression of dissent.[78] The administration of General Sani Abacha, in particular, is infamous for orchestrating the embezzlement of billions of dollars, concealed in

92 Forrest, T., Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria (Updated edn, Routledge 2019) 43.

93 Danaan, V. V., 'Analysing Poverty in Nigeria through Theoretical Lenses' *Journal of Sustainable Development* [2018] 11(1) 1, 4.

94 Igiebor, G. S. O. (note 55) 495.

95 Adagbabiri, M. M. and Okolie, U. C., 'Corruption and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic' *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research* [2018] 4(3) 41, 43.

96 Otusanya, O. J (note 56) 332.

97 Agu, J. C., (note 83) 1, 3.

foreign accounts under the pretext of national security.[79] This period further eroded institutional accountability and normalised the misuse of public resources.

With the return to civilian governance in 1999, marking the beginning of the Fourth Republic, political corruption did not abate; rather, it assumed new and more sophisticated forms under the banner of democracy. Elections became heavily monetised, with vote buying, inflated government contracts, and politically motivated appointments becoming common.[80] Politically exposed persons often enjoyed immunity or lenient prosecution.[81] Furthermore, political parties began to function less as ideological platforms and more as vehicles for elite consolidation, lacking coherence or internal democratic processes.[82] The commercialisation of political candidacy, especially during political parties' primary elections, entrenched corruption as a structural prerequisite for political power.[83]

A further significant contributor to the development of political corruption in Nigeria is the phenomenon of elite capture, whereby a narrow circle of politically connected individuals exercises disproportionate control over state policymaking, allocation of national resources, and institutional reform.[84] This elite dominance perpetuates inequality, erodes the independence of public institutions, and marginalises ordinary citizens from effective political participation.[85]

98 Okunlola, O. C., (note 67) 183, 189.
99 Igiebor, G. S. O., (note 55) 493–513.
100 Ndem, B. E., James, H. T., and Agala, F. B., 'ARDL Approach to Corruption and Economic Growth Nexus in Nigeria' *Journal of Environmental Science and Economics* [2022] 1(3) 8, 9.
101 Ojeka, S. et al., 'Corruption Perception, Institutional Quality and Performance of Listed Companies in Nigeria' *Heliyon* [2019] 5(10) 1, 3.
102 Olujobi, O. J., (note 62) Control 1, 4.
103 Otusanya, O. J. (note 56) 330–371.
104 Abubakar, S., 'Institutional Quality and Economic Growth: Evidence from Nigeria' *African Journal of Economic Review* [2020] 8(1) 48, 50.

Elite capture is especially potent in contexts where legal systems are weakened and enforcement agencies are co-opted to protect powerful interests rather than uphold justice.[86]

As Forrest aptly notes, the prevalence of political corruption in Nigeria should not be viewed merely as a consequence of individual misconduct but as the outcome of deep-seated historical, structural, and institutional factors.[87] Rather than being incidental, political corruption in Nigeria has become an adaptive and evolving system that adjusts to each regime change, military or civilian, and flourishes in the absence of strong institutional checks.

2.1.4 The Nature and Characteristics of Political Corruption

2.1.4.1 The Nature of Political Corruption

Political corruption is a multifaceted and deeply embedded phenomenon, both in how it appears and how it functions. There has been an history of scholarly debates on its nature, drawing distinctions between isolated, incidental acts of wrongdoing and corruption as a systemic issue ingrained in political and institutional frameworks.[88] In the Nigerian context, substantial evidence points towards the latter: corruption operates not as an occasional lapse but as a structural norm, underpinned by weak institutions, entrenched socio-political practices, and the complicity of the elite.[89]

Systemic corruption emerges when corrupt behaviour becomes institutionalised, shaping policy formation, public administration, and even societal expectations.[90] It spans all levels of government, from the executive and legislature to the judiciary, and often involves a complex

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105 Adeniran, A. O., 'Anti-Corruption Strategies for Balanced Development: A Case Study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)' *Advanced Journal of Social Science* [2019] 5(1) 52, 55.

87 Forrest (note 92) 75.

107 Igiebor, (note 55) 493–513.

108 Otusanya, (note 56) 330, 337.

109 Folarin, (note 75) 377, 382.

web of actors, including politicians, civil servants, business contractors, lobbyists, and international entities.[91] In such environments, corruption is not an anomaly but the standard mode of operation; it effectively becomes an alternative system of governance, often more powerful than the formal mechanisms it shadows.

Conversely, incidental corruption refers to isolated misconduct by individual actors within an otherwise functional system. These cases are usually addressed through disciplinary or judicial procedures.[92] However, in settings like Nigeria, where institutional structures are fragile, enforcement is uneven, and political commitment to reform is minimal, what might begin as individual malpractice quickly evolves into widespread institutional failure. Repeated failures to successfully prosecute prominent cases, the manipulation of anti-corruption institutions, and the continued recycling of corrupt figures into public life demonstrate how occasional corruption becomes systemic.[93]

A critical marker of systemic political corruption is the erosion of public confidence in State's institutions. Many citizens come to view government structures not as instruments of service delivery but as platforms for personal gain.[94] This disillusionment extends to the electoral system, oversight bodies, and the judiciary, reducing democratic engagement and increasing voter apathy.[95] In extreme instances, the sense of disempowerment can trigger civil unrest or regional separatist movements, as communities feel alienated from the political process.[96]

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110 Williams-Elegbe, (note 90)131, 134.

111 Abubakar, (note 104) 48, 51.

112 Adeniran, (note 105) 52, 55.

113 Augustine, A. A. and Enyi, E. P., 'Control of Corruption, Trust in Government, and Voluntary Tax Compliance in South-West, Nigeria' *Management Studies* [2020] 8(1) 84, 89.

114 Okunola, M. O., Umaru, A. & Hassan, S. I., Manifestations and Impacts of Corruption on Democratic Governance in Nigeria *International Journal of Development and Management Review* [2019] 14(1) 164–174.

115 Adagbabiri and Okolie (note 95) 41, 45.

In such settings, even well-intentioned reform initiatives often fail due to internal sabotage. Anti-corruption bodies may be politicised, laws may be enforced selectively, and whistleblowers frequently face intimidation or professional retaliation.[97] As Olujobi notes, this institutional breakdown perpetuates underdevelopment, fosters widespread public scepticism, and leads to paralysis in public administration.[98]

Consequently, political corruption in Nigeria is overwhelmingly systemic in nature. It is deeply rooted in the country's governance structures, supported by institutional inefficiencies, and sustained by a prevailing political ethos that prioritises personal or partisan interest above the public good.

2.1.4.2 Characteristics of Political Corruption

Political corruption exhibits a number of key features that not only sustain its prevalence but also obstruct meaningful institutional transformation. These characteristics expose how corruption operates in practice and reveal the systemic flaws that enable its continuation, particularly in governance systems like Nigeria, which struggle with institutional fragility.

2.1.4.2.1 Secrecy and Absence of Accountability

A defining trait of political corruption is its inherently secretive nature. Decisions involving government spending, public contracts, appointments, and policy enforcement are frequently made behind closed doors, without transparency or consultation with the public.[99] In Nigeria, this secrecy routinely undermines transparent legislation, such as the Freedom of Information Act 2011, which was designed to promote openness but is regularly bypassed by

116 Kediehor, C. et al., 'The Mass Media, Whistle Blowing Laws, and Corruption in Nigeria' *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research* [2020] 4(2) 1, 6.
117 Olujobi, (note 62) 1, 5.
118 Williams-Elegbe (note 90) 131, 135.

public officials citing "national security" or bureaucratic exemptions.[100] This entrenched opacity shields corrupt activities from scrutiny and severely weakens public oversight mechanisms.[101]

2.1.4.2.2 Exploitation of Public Resources for Private or Political Gains

A common practice within politically corrupt systems is the misuse of public funds for personal enrichment or to serve partisan interests. State resources are often diverted to fund lavish lifestyles, finance political campaigns, or reward loyal supporters, usually under misleading pretenses such as community development schemes or executive allowances.[102] The use of security votes by state governors illustrates this misuse clearly, vast sums are allocated yearly without any legal requirement for disclosure or independent auditing.[103] In Attorney-General of Ondo State v. Attorney-General of the Federation, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the importance of financial accountability, even within a federal structure.[104] Nonetheless, such legal pronouncements rarely result in practical consequences for erring officials.

2.1.4.2.3 Patronage, Clientelism, and Nepotism

In Nigeria, political corruption is deeply rooted in a system of patronage and clientelism, where political loyalty is rewarded over merit. Appointments to public office, awarding of contracts, or granting of licences are often based on personal connections or political usefulness, not competence.[105] This is clearly observable in civil service recruitment, where informal

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119 Ojogiwa, O. T., 'The Crux of Strategic Leadership for a Transformed Public Sector Management in Nigeria' *International Journal of Business and Management Studies* [2021] 13(1) 83, 86.

120 Otusanya (note 56) 330, 336.

121 Ndem, B. E., James, H. T., and Agala, F. B., 'ARDL Approach to Corruption and Economic Growth Nexus in Nigeria' *Journal of Environmental Science and Economics* [2022] 1(3) 8, 9.

122 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., and Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies for Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust' [2024] 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1, 6.

104 *Attorney-General of Ondo State v. Attorney-General of the Federation* [2002] 9 NWLR (Pt 772) 222.

124 Abubakar, (note 104) 48, 50.

networks and favouritism, commonly referred to as the “man-know-man” syndrome, erode professional standards and weaken the public sector.[106]

Nepotism further compounds this issue, as political leaders frequently favour family members or ethnic affiliates in appointments and resource distribution. Such practices clearly violate *section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution,* which enshrines the Federal Character Principle aimed at ensuring equitable representation.[107]

Moreover, clientelism results in selective allocation of benefits to certain communities or regions, mainly in return for continued electoral support.[108] This system of reward creates regional disparities, fuels ethnic divisions, and undermines national integration by reinforcing perceptions of marginalisation and exclusion.[109]

2.1.4.3.4 Weak Law Enforcement and Institutional Collapse

Political corruption flourishes in environments where law enforcement is ineffective, under-resourced, or compromised. Agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) have legal authority to tackle corruption, yet they are often subject to political manipulation, funding limitations, and lack of prosecutorial independence.[110] As a result, public perception tends to view anti-corruption efforts as selective or politically motivated, rather than systemic or objective.[111]

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125 Danaan, V. V., ‘Analysing Poverty in Nigeria through Theoretical Lenses’ [2018] 11(1) *Journal of Sustainable Development* 1, 3.

107 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), s 14(3).

127 Popoola, J., ‘Globalisation and Nigeria’s Economic Development: A Study of the Interconnectedness’ *Open Journal of Political Science* [2020] 10(3) 460, 464.

128 Adagbabiri, and Okolie (note 115) 41, 45.

129 Adeniran, (note 105) 52, 56.

130 Olujobi, (note 62) 1, 6.

Institutional dysfunction also reveals itself in the failure to obey Court judgment, corruption within the judiciary, and legislative inertia. A notable example is the Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Dariye, where despite the eventual conviction of a former state governor, the protracted legal process reflected broader challenges in enforcement, including the use of technicalities and legal loopholes to delay justice.[112] Such prolonged proceedings signal to the public and political class alike that corruption is rarely punished, thereby emboldening further wrongdoing.

Political corruption in Nigeria has some key traits, like secrecy, misappropriation of resources, clientelism, and institutional failures, that do not just exist on their own. They actually feed into each other, creating a cycle of poor governance, lack of accountability, and ongoing underdevelopment. To really tackle these issues, there is the need to have a more coordinated and progressive effort beyond the mere staggering piecemeal reforms; but rather a complete transformation of Nigeria's political culture and institutions. This means working to rebuild trust, boost transparency, and establish a governance system that prioritizes merit and accountability.

2.2 Theorical Framework

The study will examine a few of theories that have been propounded by jurists and to see how they relate to the study and their significance.

2.2.1 Principal-Agent Theory

The principal-agent theory is among the most extensively employed frameworks for explaining the mechanisms that drive political corruption. Originating from agency theory, it

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131 *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Joshua Dariye* [2018] Court of Appeal, Abuja Division; see also [Punch Newspapers, 12 June 2018] https://punchng.com/dariye-jailed-14-years-for-n1-162bn-fraud/ accessed 21 May 2025.

explores the dynamics of a relationship where one party, the principal, entrusts authority to another, the agent, to carry out duties or make decisions on their behalf.[113] In governance, the principal is typically the citizens, while the agent refers to elected or appointed public officials. The expectation is that the agent will act in the principal's best interests. However, corruption emerges when this delegation is exploited for personal or political benefit, resulting in a breakdown of accountability and trust.

This breakdown is primarily sustained by two critical factors: information asymmetry and the absence of effective sanctions. Information asymmetry arises when agents have greater access to, and control over, information than the principal.[114] This imbalance prevents effective monitoring and creates opportunities for misconduct to go unnoticed. In the political sphere, such asymmetries are evident in opaque budgeting procedures, non-transparent contract awards, and hidden sources of campaign financing, all of which facilitate undisclosed corrupt behaviour.[115]

Moreover, when there are no substantial consequences for misconduct, corruption is likely to thrive. The absence of reliable legal, institutional, or electoral accountability mechanisms diminishes the likelihood of punishment, increasing the incentive for corrupt practices.[116] This is particularly noticeable in Nigeria, where many high-profile corruption cases are either abandoned, protracted in court, or resolved through plea deals that are perceived by the public as insufficiently punitive.[117] An illustrative example is the case of *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Jolly Nyame*, in which the former Governor of Taraba State was convicted for misappropriating ₦1.64 billion of public funds and initially sentenced to 14 years imprisonment.

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132 Augustine and Enyi (note 113) 84, 87.
133 Abubakar, (note 104) 48, 52.
134 Williams-Elegbe, (note 90) 131, 137.
135 Adeniran, (note 105) 52, 56.
136 Otusanya, O. J. and Lauwo, S. G., 'Corruption and Socio-Political Economic Structures: A Case of Nigeria' [2019] 26(1) *Journal of Financial Crime* 330, 335.

The Court of Appeal later reduced the sentence to 12 years, and restitution was ordered for some of the stolen funds.[118] Similarly, in *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Joshua Dariye*, the former Governor of Plateau State was found guilty of diverting ₦1.126 billion from the state's treasury and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.[119] However, the public outcry over the eventual presidential pardon granted to both Nyame and Dariye in 2022 significantly weakened the deterrent effect of these convictions and further undermined public trust in the anti-corruption campaign.[120]

More recently, the ongoing case involving *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Yahaya Bello*, the former Governor of Kogi State, has attracted national attention. Bello is facing allegations of embezzling over ₦80 billion through complex financial transactions. The legal battle has been marred by jurisdictional controversies and resistance to arrest by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), highlighting the extent of political interference and elite impunity that often complicates high-profile prosecutions.[121] These outcomes collectively diminish public faith in the legal system and send conflicting signals about the state's commitment to combating political corruption.[122]

The principal-agent model is particularly valuable in analysing Nigeria's governance failures, where elected officials often act contrary to the public good. Upon assuming office, many pursue personal gain, reward political allies, or undermine institutional checks to shield themselves from scrutiny.[123] Institutions tasked with oversight, such as legislatures, the judiciary,

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118 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, "EFCC Secures 14-Year Jail Term Against Ex-Governor Jolly Nyame," *EFCC Official Website*, 2018.

119 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, 'Dariye Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison for ₦1.1bn Fraud,' *EFCC Official Website*, 2018.

120 Olujobi (note 62) 1–27.

121 Punch Newspaper, 'Yahaya Bello: EFCC Declares Former Governor Wanted,' *Punch*, April 2024.

122 Obamuyi (note 54) 80–105.

142 Igiebor (note 55) 493, 497.

and anti-corruption bodies, are frequently compromised or ineffective, resulting in "multiple-agency failure".[124]

Furthermore, elections, which should serve as mechanisms for public accountability, are regularly compromised through tactics like vote buying, ballot tampering, and manipulation of results.[125] These practices erode citizens' ability to hold politicians accountable through democratic means, thereby entrenching impunity and insulating officials from the consequences of corruption.

Although the principal-agent theory provides a compelling framework for understanding how corruption operates at both individual and institutional levels, it is not without critique. It has been argued that the model oversimplifies corruption by assuming a clear-cut separation between principals and agents.[126] In many political systems, particularly those dominated by patronage and elite networks like Nigeria, the lines between citizen and corrupt official are often blurred, as both may benefit from the status quo.[127] Nonetheless, the theory remains an essential analytical tool for understanding how corruption flourishes under conditions marked by weak oversight, lack of transparency, and ineffective enforcement.

2.2.2 Rent-Seeking Theory

Rent-seeking theory provides an insightful framework for understanding political corruption by highlighting how individuals or interest groups manipulate the political or regulatory environment to secure undue advantages, referred to as "rents", without contributing

143 Olujobi (note 62) 1, 4.
144 Okunlola (note 67) 183, 192.
126 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 56) 330–371
127 Otusanya and Lauwo (n 56) 338.

to productivity or creating real economic value.[128] Originating from public choice economics, the term rent-seeking refers to the pursuit of financial gain through influence over public policy or State's institutions, rather than through legitimate business or innovation.[129]

In a rent-seeking context, public officials exploit their discretionary powers to distribute State's assets, such as contracts, permits, and licences, to favoured individuals or entities in exchange for personal rewards, loyalty, or political support.[130] This leads to collusive relationships between government bureaucrats and politically connected elites, who manipulate governance frameworks not for the collective good, but for private enrichment.[131]

In Nigeria, rent-seeking practices are particularly pronounced in highly regulated and opaque sectors like oil and gas, customs administration, and public procurement.[132] As Olujobi observes, regulatory agencies in the petroleum industry are frequently compromised by political influence, enabling the manipulation of licensing arrangements and revenue flows.[133] The mismanagement of fuel subsidy programmes and the selective allocation of oil blocks to political loyalists are classic examples of rent-seeking activities.[134]

This behaviour thrives in conditions where monopolistic control, wide administrative discretion, and a lack of oversight intersect.[135] When officials monopolise control over scarce State resources or services, they can create artificial scarcity that allows them to demand bribes or extract illicit payments. The absence of transparent rules governing how contracts or waivers are

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147 Danaan, V. V., 'Analysing Poverty in Nigeria through Theoretical Lenses' [2018] 11(1) *Journal of Sustainable Development* 1, 4.

148 Abubakar, (note 104) 48, 52.

149 Williams-Elegbe (note 90) 131, 139.

150 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 56) Crime 330, 334.

151 Ndem, B. E., James, H. T., and Agala, F. B., 'ARDL Approach to Corruption and Economic Growth Nexus in Nigeria' [2022] 1(3) Journal of Environmental Science and Economics 8, 10.

152 Olujobi (note 62) 1, 6.

153 Forrest, (note 92) 92.

154 Augustine and Enyi (note 113) 84, 89.

issued further compounds the problem.[136] In Nigeria, much of this discretion is centralised within the executive branch, particularly among ministers and top officials in strategic ministries and agencies, thereby providing fertile ground for rent-seeking.

A notable illustration is the Malabu Oil Scandal (OPL 245), which involved the controversial award of valuable oil assets to private parties under questionable circumstances. The case was marked by allegations of bribery involving government ministers and multinational corporations.[137] Despite the international attention and cross-border investigations it attracted, enforcement outcomes within Nigeria remain minimal, reflecting institutional weaknesses in holding powerful individuals accountable.

Moreover, rent-seeking often leads to policy manipulation, as public officials may deliberately design inefficient systems that generate continuous avenues for private gain. For example, persistent port congestion, complicated tariff structures, and dependence on imported petroleum products persist partly because they benefit entrenched rent-seekers within the bureaucracy.[138] These inefficiencies are not accidental; they are strategically maintained to facilitate ongoing extraction of unearned profits from public systems.

The societal impact of rent-seeking is profound. It undermines economic competitiveness, discourages entrepreneurship, and channels national resources away from sectors that foster genuine development. Additionally, it reinforces socio-economic inequality, as only those with

155 Adeniran (note 105) 52, 55.

156 BBC News, 'Malabu Oil Scandal: Nigeria's Ex-Minister and Shell Face Charges,' 2017 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39629615 accessed 21 May 2025.

157 Ojogiwa, O. T., 'The Crux of Strategic Leadership for a Transformed Public Sector Management in Nigeria' [2021] 13(1) *International Journal of Business and Management Studies* 83, 88.

political influence can access such benefits, leaving the majority excluded.[139] Citizens ultimately pay the price through higher costs, substandard services, and stunted national progress.

This illustrates that political corruption is not always characterised by direct theft from the public treasury. Rather, it frequently involves deliberately sustaining distortions within regulatory or economic frameworks to extract hidden benefits. These practices are widespread in Nigeria, where regulatory capture, executive dominance, and institutional opacity form the structural foundation upon which political corruption is perpetuated.

2.2.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory provides an important perspective on political corruption by emphasising the pivotal role that institutions play in influencing human conduct, shaping societal outcomes, and either enabling or constraining corrupt behaviour. In this context, institutions encompass both formal structures, such as laws and official regulations, and informal norms, including cultural values and unwritten codes that govern social, political, and economic interactions.[140] Unlike theories that frame corruption primarily as the result of personal greed or ethical failure, institutional theory asserts that corruption flourishes or diminishes based on the design, implementation, and strength of institutional framework.

Within this model, formal institutions include established legal instruments, regulatory systems, judicial procedures, and administrative rules that prescribe expected behaviour and impose penalties for misconduct.[141] Nigeria, for example, has developed an extensive legal architecture to combat corruption, including the Criminal Code, the Economic and Financial

158 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., and Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies or Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust' [2024] 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1, 5.

159 Danaan, V. V., 'Analysing Poverty in Nigeria through Theoretical Lenses' [2018] 11(1) *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 1, 3.

160 Williams-Elegbe (note 90) 131, 137.

Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, and legislation on public procurement.[142] These instruments are intended to define what constitutes corruption, establish punitive measures, and empower institutions to investigate and prosecute offenders.

Nevertheless, the efficacy of these formal systems is frequently undermined by the influence of informal institutions, such as unwritten rules, prevailing cultural practices, patron-client relationships, and social expectations.[143] In the Nigerian setting, practices like ethnic allegiance, godfatherism, and prebendalism often supersede legal principles, creating alternative channels of authority and accountability.[144] These informal norms tend to privilege loyalty to individuals or groups over adherence to legal and ethical standards**.**[145] As noted by Otusanya and Lauwo, political elites in Nigeria commonly exploit both formal and informal institutional arrangements to entrench their dominance and insulate themselves from accountability.[146]

A major consequence of institutional dysfunctionality is the ineffective enforcement of anti-corruption measures. While Nigeria has multiple agencies tasked with tackling corruption, including the EFCC and the ICPC, these bodies often lack sufficient independence, resources, and political support to carry out their mandates effectively.[147] Though the EFCC has achieved convictions of high-profile political figures, its work is sometimes criticised for being politically selective or subject to executive interference.[148] The prolonged legal battle in Federal Republic of

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161 Olujobi (note 62) 1, 6.
162 Otusanya (note 56) 330, 334.
144 Forrest, (note 92) 75.
164 Folarin, (note 75) 377, 382.
146 Otusanya and Lauwo (n 56) 336.
166 Adeniran (note 105) 52, 56.
167 Abubakar, (note 104) 48, 52.

Nigeria v. Joshua Dariye, which took over a decade to resolve, illustrates how bureaucratic delays and procedural obstacles often impede justice.[149]

Furthermore, the absence of genuine political will is a key barrier to institutional reform. Political will, defined as the government's commitment to pursue and implement anti-corruption measures consistently and impartially, is often inconsistent or lacking.[150] Institutional theorists stress that legal reforms alone are insufficient unless they are backed by sustained commitment from leadership.[151] In many cases, those at the helm of governance are themselves entangled in corrupt networks or benefit from maintaining the status quo, resulting in symbolic rather than substantive anti-corruption efforts.[152] Campaigns against corruption in such contexts tend to be reactive, driven by public or media pressure, or targeted at political rivals rather than being systemic and impartial.

Another important insight from this theory is the notion that corruption becomes self-perpetuating in weak institutions. When corrupt behaviour goes unpunished and is rewarded instead, it becomes embedded in the institutional culture. Over time, newcomers are socialised into these practices, and reformers are either marginalised or co-opted into the system.[153] This cycle explains why many anti-corruption initiatives in Nigeria fail to produce lasting improvements, because the institutions themselves have adapted to accommodate and reproduce corruption.

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168 Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Joshua Dariye [2018] Court of Appeal, Abuja Division; see also [Punch Newspapers, 12 June 2018] https://punchng.com/dariye-jailed-14-years-for-n1-162bn-fraud/ accessed 21 May 2025.

169 Augustine and Enyi (note 113) 84, 88.

170 Ndem, B. E., James, H. T., and Agala, F. B., "ARDL Approach to Corruption and Economic Growth Nexus in Nigeria" [2022] 1(3) Journal of Environmental Science and Economics 8, 9.

171 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., and Eneiga, R. U., "Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies for Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust" (2024) 8(1) International Journal of Economics and Public Policy 1, 4.

172 Popoola, (note 127) 460, 466.

Institutional theory demonstrates that political corruption in Nigeria is not simply the result of personal failings but a systemic issue, arising from the interaction between weak legal institutions and deeply rooted informal norms. Addressing the problem effectively requires more than legal reform; it necessitates a fundamental transformation of institutional culture, incentive systems, and the entrenched power structures that sustain impunity.

2.2.1 Historical Foundation

The history of political corruption in Nigeria reflects the country's ongoing challenges with institutional development, accountable governance, and ethical leadership. Corruption has evolved alongside Nigeria's political journey, spanning colonial rule, military governance, and democratic civilian administration, with each phase embedding specific patterns of corrupt behaviour that continue to influence present-day politics.

2.2.1.1 Colonial Legacy and Pre-Independence Corruption

Political corruption in Nigeria has roots in the era of British colonial administration, where governance was centralised, hierarchical, and heavily extractive.[154] Colonial officials operated through traditional rulers and local chiefs, often employing coercive taxation, patronage systems, and a reward structure that prioritised loyalty over accountability.[155] The indirect rule system institutionalised clientelist politics, fostering practices such as the diversion of community funds and unaccountable local leadership.[156]

The governance model introduced during colonial rule lacked transparency and discouraged indigenous participation, setting the precedent for viewing access to state power as a route to

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154 Forrest, (note 92) 43.
174 Danaan, (note 147) 1, 3.
175 Folarin (note 75) 377, 380.

personal gain.[157] These colonial-era governance deficiencies formed the bedrock of what would become entrenched political corruption in Nigeria's post-independence period.

2.2.1.2 Corruption Under Military Regimes (1966–1999)

Following independence in 1960 and the collapse of the First Republic in 1966, Nigeria entered a prolonged phase of military governance, which redefined and escalated the nature of political corruption.[158] Military regimes operated without democratic checks and balances, concentrating power in the executive, and governing with limited transparency and public accountability.[159] Although these regimes often claimed to oppose corruption, they were frequently implicated in large-scale embezzlement and abuse of public funds.

The administration of General Ibrahim Babangida between 1985 and 1993, for instance, has been heavily criticised for its handling of Nigeria's oil revenue windfall during the Gulf War, much of which was allegedly unaccounted for.[160] Similarly, General Sani Abacha's regime between 1993 and 1998 is widely referenced as one of the most corrupt in Nigerian history, with over $5 billion allegedly stolen from public coffers and concealed in overseas accounts.[161] International collaboration has since led to the repatriation of portions of the stolen funds, notably through

176 Adagbabiri and Okolie, (note 115) 41, 42.
177 Igiebor (note 55) 493–513.
178 Otusanya (note 56) 330, 332.
179 Augustine and Enyi (note 113) 84, 87.
180 Olujobi (note 62) 1, 6.

agreements with the Swiss government, underlining the transnational nature of grand corruption.[162]

Despite professed anti-corruption aims, military takeovers were often driven by ethnic rivalries, struggles for control of national wealth, or political revenge rather than any real commitment to institutional reform.[163] Courts were suspended or subdued, while critics and whistleblowers faced repression.[164] This culture of impunity, entrenched during military rule, remains a key feature of Nigeria's political landscape even in democratic times.

2.2.1.3 Democratic Era and Political Corruption in the Fourth Republic (1999–Present)

The return to civilian democracy in 1999 heralded the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, raising hopes for greater transparency, adherence to the rule of law, and inclusive governance. However, while democratic institutions were restored, corruption did not abate, it merely adapted to the new political setting. Politicians have continued to exploit legal frameworks to serve private interests, using strategies such as budget padding, inflated contracts, patronage politics, and electoral manipulation.[165]

This period has been marred by numerous high-profile scandals involving senior government officials, legislators, and even leaders of anti-corruption bodies. The Halliburton bribery scandal, which implicated top Nigerian officials in a multinational kickback scheme over liquefied natural gas contracts, is a notable example. Despite successful prosecutions abroad, including the United States Department of Justice, Nigeria has struggled to hold its own citizens accountable.[166]

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181 BBC News, "Abacha loot: Switzerland returns $321m to Nigeria," 4 February 2020 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51363873 accessed 21 May 2025.

163 Forrest (note 92) 70.

183 Popoola, (note 127) 460, 463.

184 Igiebor (note 55) 493, 497.

185 Obamuyi (note 54) 80, 90.

Another prominent case is that of James Ibori, the former Governor of Delta State, who was convicted in the United Kingdom for money laundering and fraud, receiving a 13-year prison sentence.[167] The fact that justice was delivered abroad, rather than domestically, highlights the weakness of Nigeria's legal and judicial systems in handling high-level corruption. Similarly, the "Dasukigate" scandal, involving the former National Security Adviser Sambo Dasuki, centred on the alleged misappropriation of $2.1 billion in defense funds. Years later, the case remains unresolved within Nigeria's legal system.[168]

The creation of anti-corruption institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) was a strategic response to the pervasive nature of corruption. However, these agencies have often faced accusations of politicisation, selective enforcement, and lack of autonomy.[169] Nigeria's poor ranking on global indices, such as Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, reflects the gap between institutional frameworks and effective enforcement.[170]

The history of political corruption in Nigeria paints a troubling picture, showcasing a long-standing pattern of misconduct that stretches from colonial times through military rule and into our current democratic struggles. Each of these periods has played a role in making corruption seem normal, resulting in weak institutions and governance systems that are all too easy to exploit. Therefore, any genuine attempt to tackle corruption in Nigeria needs to be grounded in a solid understanding of its historical context. It must go beyond just superficial

186 *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. James Ibori* [2012] Southwark Crown Court, London; see also BBC News, 'James Ibori jailed for 13 years for fraud,' 17 April 2012 https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-17734658 accessed 21 May 2025.

187 Ojeka, S. et al., 'Corruption Perception, Institutional Quality and Performance of Listed Companies in Nigeria' [2019] 5(10) Heliyon 1, 3.

188 Adeniran (note 105) 52, 56.

189 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2023" https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/nzl accessed 21 May 2025.

changes and really dig into the deep-rooted formal and informal practices that keep corruption alive.

2.3 Literature Review

Political corruption in Nigeria is evident in numerous deeply embedded practices that permeate the electoral, administrative, and policy-making systems. These practices not only reflect institutional fragility but also operate as tools for elite entrenchment, undermining democratic principles, socio-economic fairness, and national cohesion.

One of the most prevalent expressions of political corruption in Nigeria is electoral misconduct, such as vote buying, ballot box theft, manipulation of election results, and the intimidation of voters and electoral personnel.[171] These activities erode the transparency and credibility of elections by enabling unqualified or unpopular candidates to gain power through financial inducements or coercion.[172] Vote buying, in particular, has evolved into a highly organised system, particularly during party primaries and general elections, where candidates distribute money, food items, or goods in exchange for votes.[173]

This form of corruption thrives due to widespread poverty, limited civic awareness, and weak enforcement of electoral laws.[174] As highlighted by Ojo *et al*, these practices are so widespread that they have become a routine feature of elections, often carried out with the assistance or complicity of political parties, security agents, and even officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).[175] This not only compromises the integrity of the democratic

190 Ojo, L. B., Eusebius, A. C., Ifeanyi, O. J., and Aderemi, T. A., 'Political Corruption, Income Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria' [2020] 13(1) Acta Universitatis Danubius. Relationes Internationales 1, 3.

191 Folarin (note 75) 377, 384.

192 Igiebor (note 55) 493, 495.

193 Augustine and Enyi (note 113) 84, 87.

175 Ibid.

process but also deters credible and responsible individuals from participating in the nation's electoral process, since success is often tied to financial capacity rather than merit.[176]

A major manifestation of political corruption is the embezzlement and misappropriation of State funds. This includes inflated project costs, payment for projects that do not exist, and outright theft of public resources by those in positions of authority.[177] According to Ndem, James and Agala, such financial mismanagement severely impairs development, as political elites prioritise personal enrichment over public service.[178]

For example, in Federal Republic of *FRN v. Joshua Dariye*, the former Plateau State Governor was convicted of diverting over ₦1.1 billion intended for ecological projects into his private accounts.[179] While his conviction was seen as a rare success in the fight against corruption, the case also revealed deep institutional delays and procedural inefficiencies. Similarly, the widely publicised arms deal scandal involving Sambo Dasuki, Nigeria's former National Security Adviser, illustrates the scale of public resource diversion, with $2.1 billion allegedly redirected from military procurement efforts.[180]

Nepotism and cronyism continue to characterise political leadership in Nigeria. These practices involve appointing relatives, ethnic associates, or loyalists to government positions, regardless of competence.[181] Clientelism further compounds this, as public goods and services are distributed not based on merit or national priorities, but on loyalty and political allegiance.

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195 Adagbabiri and Okolie (note 115) 41, 43.

196 Obamuyi (note 54) 80, 88.

197 Ndem, B. E., James, H. T., and Agala, F. B., "ARDL Approach to Corruption and Economic Growth Nexus in Nigeria" [2022] 1(3) Journal of Environmental Science and Economics 8, 10.

198 *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Joshua Dariye* [2018] Court of Appeal, Abuja Division; see also Punch Newspapers, "Dariye jailed 14 years for ₦1.162bn fraud," 12 June 2018 https://punchng.com/dariye-jailed-14-years-for-n1-162bn-fraud/ accessed 21 May 2025.

199 Popoola, (note 127) 460, 465.

200 Okunola, M. O., Umaru, A., and Hassan, S. I., "Manifestations and Impacts of Corruption on Democratic Governance in Nigeria" (2019) 14(1) *International Journal of Development and Management Review* 164, 167.

According to Adagbabiri and Okolie, Nigerian politics often follows a prebendal pattern, in which public offices are treated as personal property used to reward followers.[182] This not only diminishes professionalism in governance but also entrenches mediocrity and inefficiency within public institutions. Okunola's analysis further reveals that political decisions and appointments are often skewed towards ethnic or regional interests, fuelling socio-political divisions.[183]

Agu, Nkwo and Eneiga argue that such nepotistic tendencies distort national development efforts, especially when public projects are sited not for their strategic value, but to favour regions aligned with political leaders.[184] This is a clear violation of section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution, which mandates equitable representation and respect for federal character.[185]

Nigerian political elites frequently manipulate State policies, programmes, and legal framework to advance private or partisan agendas. This includes altering budget priorities, terminating initiatives from previous administrations, and using State institutions to consolidate political influence.[186]

Otusanya and Lauwo highlight that policymaking in Nigeria is rarely guided by public consultation or empirical planning; rather, it is shaped by elite negotiations and informal alliances.[187] This facilitates elite capture, where public resources and regulatory concessions are distributed among a few powerful individuals or entities with political connections.[188] The fuel

201 Adagbabiri and Okolie (note 115) 41, 45.

202 Okunola, O. C., 'Political Regime Types and Economic Development in Nigeria: Significance of Conflict and Corruption' [2019] 31(2) *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 183, 190.

203 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., and Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies for Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust' [2024] 8(1) International Journal of Economics and Public Policy 1, 4.

185 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), s 14(3).

205 Olujobi (note 62) 1, 5.

206 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 56) 330, 334.

188 Forrest (note 92) 70.

subsidy scheme is a well-documented case where, under the guise of pro-poor policy, billions of naira were siphoned off by politically connected firms.[189]

Policy distortion also extends into the legislative and judicial sectors, where laws are sometimes passed, modified, or delayed in order to shield political actors from accountability or to target opponents.[190] This undermines the rule of law and reduces legislation to a transactional instrument, governed more by expediency than the common good.

208 Ndem, James and Agala (note 197) 8, 11.

209 Ojeka, S. et al., 'Corruption Perception, Institutional Quality and Performance of Listed Companies in Nigeria' [2019] 5(10) Heliyon 1, 3.

CHAPTER THREE

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AGAINST POLITICAL CORRUPTION

3.1 Legal Framework

Political corruption in Nigeria, as in many other developing nations, is not a self-contained issue. Its repercussions, such as money laundering, illicit financial outflows, and bribery across borders, have prompted the need for an international legal response. In recent decades, a range of global legal frameworks has been established to introduce uniform anti-corruption standards. These mechanisms aim to foster accountability, transparency, intergovernmental cooperation, and the observance of the rule of law beyond national boundaries.

Some international regimes now adopted in the country like the *United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC),* adopted in 2003 and formally ratified by Nigeria in 2004, stands as the most wide-ranging international treaty focused on anti-corruption. UNCAC addresses several critical areas including prevention, criminalisation, international collaboration, recovery of stolen assets, and technical support. It obligates signatory countries to develop independent anti-corruption agencies, enforce ethical conduct in public administration, improve procurement systems, and cooperate internationally in asset recovery efforts.

Another significant global standard, though Nigeria is not a direct signatory, is the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Convention Anti-Bribery Convention*. Despite Nigeria not being a member of the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Convention* has impacted the country through trade relations and investment activities with OECD states. International corporations operating in Nigeria, particularly from Europe and North America, are obligated to comply with OECD rules prohibiting bribery of foreign public officials. As a result, Nigerian entities participating in global financial transactions must align with stringent compliance and transparency practices, indirectly reinforcing accountability through foreign regulatory pressure.[191]

Likewise, the *Financial Action Task Force (FATF)* has played a pivotal role in shaping global responses to financial crimes, including corruption. FATF's 40 Recommendations have guided many nations, including Nigeria, in establishing legal and institutional measures against money laundering and terrorism financing. Nigeria, though not a full FATF member, has adopted these recommendations, influencing banking regulations and KYC (Know Your Customer) policies. These frameworks support the activities of institutions like the EFCC in tackling complex corruption cases. However, as noted by *Aloko* and *Abdullahi,* the challenge lies in execution, as entrenched political interests and weak prosecutorial structures frequently derail enforcement of FATF-related obligations.[192]

In addition to formal conventions, international financial institutions such as the *World Bank* and *International Monetary Fund (IMF)* contribute to Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts by embedding transparency and accountability benchmarks into their loan and aid agreements. These institutions also offer technical assistance and oversight through performance evaluations. Moreover, organisations like Transparency International, via its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), provide essential data that spotlight Nigeria's governance deficits. Persistent poor rankings

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191 Otusanya, O. J., & Lauwo, S. G., 'Corruption and Socio-Political Economic Structures: A Case of Nigeria', *Journal of Financial Crime,* 26(1), 330–371 [2019].

192 Aloko, S. M., & Abdullahi, U., 'Corruption and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: Challenges and Solutions', *Scientific Research Journal,* 6(7), 1–10 [2018].

on the CPI have raised concerns among global donors and intensified pressure for governance reform.[193]

Despite endorsing these international frameworks, Nigeria's domestic implementation has often fallen short. Although institutions have been created and laws enacted in alignment with global norms, enforcement is frequently compromised by political interference and selective prosecution. As observed by *Obamuyi* and *Olayiwola,* Nigeria's political elite tends to endorse international anti-corruption agendas rhetorically, while simultaneously weakening the very institutions meant to uphold them.[194]

Asset recovery remains one of the most demanding aspects of global anti-corruption law. Chapter V *of the UNCAC* addresses this by outlining protocols for mutual legal assistance and the repatriation of stolen assets. Nevertheless, the process is typically slow and mired in bureaucracy. A well-known example is the Abacha loot, where an estimated $3–5 billion was siphoned off by the former Nigerian military ruler. Although some of the stolen funds were eventually returned from Switzerland, the United States, and the United Kingdom, the legal and diplomatic negotiations spanned over two decades, undermining public confidence in both Nigerian and international accountability systems.[195]

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193 Ojo, L. B., Eusebius, A. C., Ifeanyi, O. J., & Aderemi, T. A., 'Political Corruption, Income Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria'*, Acta Universitatis Danubius. Relationes Internationales*, 13(1) [2020].

194 Obamuyi, T. M., & Olayiwola, S. O., 'Corruption and Economic Growth in India and Nigeria,' *Journal of Economics and Management* (35), 80–105 [2019].

195 Igiebor, G. S. O., 'Political Corruption in Nigeria: Implications for Economic Development in the Fourth Republic,'' *Journal of Developing Societies,* 35(4), 493–513 [2019].

However, as Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga point out, these mechanisms will only be truly effective when matched by credible actions, judicial autonomy, and a genuine political will to implement anti-corruption measures consistently.[196]

A key part of Nigeria's anti-corruption strategy lies within regional legal frameworks established by African and West African organizations. These frameworks, made up of conventions, protocols, and peer review mechanisms, aim to address governance issues that are particularly relevant to the region, such as ethnic politics, weak institutional capacity, and ongoing underdevelopment. While they align with global anti-corruption initiatives, they provide more customized solutions that reflect Africa's unique political and socio-economic landscape.

One of the most impactful frameworks is the *African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC),* which was adopted in 2003 and ratified by Nigeria in 2006. As a pivotal regional legal tool, the *AUCPCC* requires member states to criminalize corruption, set up independent anti-corruption agencies, promote transparency in political party funding, and boost citizen engagement in governance.[197] Scholars like *Otusanya* and *Lauwo* view the *AUCPCC* as a vital African-led initiative aimed at addressing institutional shortcomings across the continent without depending on externally imposed criteria.[198] However, Nigeria has faced considerable challenges in putting these measures into practice, grappling with issues like weak enforcement, political meddling, and a lack of coordination among oversight bodies.[199]

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196 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., & Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies for Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust,' *Int'l Journal of Economics and Public Policy,* 8(1), 1–15 [2024].

197 African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, *adapted 11 July 2003*, entered into force 5 August 2006.

198 Otusanya, O. J., & Lauwo, S. G., (note 191) 330–371.

199 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., & Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and anti-corruption measures in Nigeria: Strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability and public trust', [2024] 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1–15.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has also played a crucial role in shaping regional anti-corruption efforts. Its Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption (2001) promotes legal harmonization among member states, encourages mutual assistance in recovering stolen assets, and fosters collaboration in criminal investigations related to corruption.[200] Although it may not be as frequently referenced as AU instruments, *ECOWAS's* protocol offers essential support for cross-border enforcement, particularly in cases where financial crimes and asset concealment involve players from different jurisdictions.

ECOWAS has woven anti-corruption efforts into its larger mission for peace and security. The *ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)* makes a clear connection between poor governance and corruption, highlighting how they can lead to political instability and violent conflict.[201] This broader perspective positions corruption not just as a legal or financial issue, but as a trigger for more profound systemic threats, which calls for comprehensive solutions that blend justice, economic policy, and conflict resolution.

Additionally, the *African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM),* a voluntary self-assessment tool introduced under the *New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD),* keeps an eye on governance quality across African Union member states. While it doesn't have binding authority, the APRM assesses governance indicators such as transparency, public sector integrity, and the effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions.[202] Nigeria's involvement in the *APRM* has highlighted significant gaps in its anti-corruption framework, particularly regarding implementation failures and political interference in regulatory bodies. *Mlambo* and colleagues

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200 ECOWAS, *Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption*, Dakar, 2001.
201 ECOWAS, *Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)*, adopted 2008.
202 New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), 'African Peer Review Mechanism'*: Nigeria Country Review Report No. 1*, 2008.

suggest that although the *APRM* has potential, it often falls short due to elite control and inadequate follow-up by the states involved.[203]

Another key player in the region is the *Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA)*, a specialized ECOWAS institution that assists member states, including Nigeria, in bolstering their *anti-money laundering (AML)* and counter-terrorist financing *(CTF) frameworks*. *GIABA* is crucial in providing technical assessments, legislative guidance, and enforcement evaluations.[204] Its 2021 Mutual Evaluation Report on Nigeria uncovered significant weaknesses, particularly in areas like beneficial ownership transparency, delays in prosecuting politically exposed persons (PEPs), and a lack of robust enforcement of AML protocols.[205]

Despite the increasing number of regional frameworks and initiatives, Nigeria's involvement has been a bit hit or miss. As Obamuyi and Olayiwola highlight, the country's efforts to follow through on regional anti-corruption commitments often get sidetracked by local political agendas, where the anti-corruption narrative is used selectively for accountability.[206] Similarly, Folarin points out that many regional mechanisms lack the teeth to enforce their rules and impose sanctions, which limits their effectiveness in curbing powerful political elites.[207]

That said, these regional legal structures still hold significant symbolic and political importance. They create spaces for civil society to engage, promote dialogue between governments, and act as benchmarks for governance reforms. Events like the African Union's Anti-Corruption Day,

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203 Mlambo, D. N., Mubecua, M. A., Mpanza, S. E., & Mlambo, V. H., Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa, [2019] 11(1) *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 39–47.

204 GIABA, *Mandate and Functions*, available at: https://www.giaba.org/about-giaba/

205 GIABA, *Mutual Evaluation Report: Nigeria*, May 2021.

206 Obamuyi, T. M., & Olayiwola, S. O., *Corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria*, (2019) (35) *Journal of Economics and Management* 80–105.

207 Folarin, S., *Corruption, politics and governance in Nigeria*, in Nigerian Politics [2021] 377–394.

celebrated every July 11, help raise public awareness and serve as gentle nudges for reform across the continent.[208] Likewise, ECOWAS's ongoing push for electoral transparency, the rule of law, and independent judiciaries continues to shape national discussions in Nigeria and beyond.

3.1.1 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999

The 1999 Constitution (as amended) stands as Nigeria's top legal framework, laying the groundwork for anti-corruption efforts. In particular, *Section 15(5)* mandates that the state must "abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power," which means there's a constitutional duty to fight corruption.[209] Moreover, the Constitution sets up systems to maintain financial integrity in public administration, *Sections 84 and 85* give oversight responsibilities to the Auditor-General, while *Sections 88 and 89* empower the legislature to carry out investigations.[210] However, as Okunlola has noted, the effectiveness of these constitutional measures is often hampered by a lack of enforcement capacity and the politicization of institutional roles.[211]

3.1.2 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act

The principal legal basis for prosecuting financial crimes in Nigeria is set out in the *Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act of 2004*. This legislation established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), granting it extensive authority to investigate, prosecute, and coordinate the enforcement of laws pertaining to economic and financial crimes.[212] The scope of its jurisdiction covers a broad spectrum of

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208 African Union, *AU Anti-Corruption Day*, available at: https://au.int/en/anti-corruption-day
209 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999 (as amended), s 15(5).
210 Ibid., ss 84–89.
211 Okunlola, O. C., 'Political regime types and economic development in Nigeria: Significance of conflict and corruption' [2019] 31(2) *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 183–216.
212 *Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004*, s 6.

offences, such as corruption, advance fee fraud (popularly referred to as 419), money laundering, and the embezzlement of public funds.[213]

Academic commentary recognises the Commission's considerable contribution to anti-corruption initiatives in Nigeria. Olujobi notes that the EFCC has been especially 'instrumental in tackling high-profile corruption cases, particularly in Nigeria's oil and gas sector',[214] an area widely recognised as susceptible to rent-seeking activities and large-scale corruption. This is supported by several convictions of prominent individuals, including former state governors, ministers, and senior bankers,[215] illustrating the agency's ability to handle intricate financial misconduct.

Despite these accomplishments, the Commission's operational efficacy and perceived legitimacy are heavily debated. A substantial portion of critique highlights its alleged vulnerability to political influence. The EFCC's efficiency is frequently doubted owing to accusations of partiality, administrative challenges, and executive interference.[216] This commonly translates into a perception of selective justice, wherein investigations focus unduly on opposition members, whilst associates of the governing administration evade accountability.[217]

Moreover, the procedural results of its cases weaken its deterrent capacity. According to Obamuyi and Olayiwola, 'while the EFCC has made progress in prosecutions, its overall ability

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213 ibid s 46.

214 O.J Olujobi, 'Nigeria's upstream petroleum industry anti-corruption legal framework: the necessity for overhauling and enrichment' [2023] 26(7) *Journal of Money Laundering* Control 1, 5.

215 See, for example, *FRN v Joshua Dariye* (Unreported) Suit No: FCT/ABJ/CR/81/2007; *FRN v Jolly Nyame* (Unreported) Suit No: FCT/ABJ/CR/81/2007.

216 A.O Adeniran, 'Anti-corruption strategies for balanced development: A case study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)' [2019] 5(1) *Advanced Journal of Social Science* 52, 58.

217 G.S.O Igiebor, 'Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic' [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493, 502.

to deter crime has been undermined by plea bargains and slow legal processes.'[218] The prevalent use of plea bargaining, which often leads to unduly light sentences for individuals with political connections, coupled with the protracted delays characteristic of the Nigerian judicial system, fosters an environment in which the repercussions for major corruption are frequently negligible.[219] Thus, in spite of its strong legal authority, the EFCC's effectiveness is limited by political meddling and systemic shortcomings within the wider judicial framework.

3.1.3 Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) was established under the ICPC Act of 2000[220] as a fundamental component of Nigeria's framework for combating corruption. In contrast to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which addresses a wider spectrum of financial crimes, the ICPC is specifically mandated to deal with corruption and associated offences in the public sector.[221] Its responsibilities are threefold: to carry out investigations and prosecute offenders; to examine and provide guidance on the procedures of public institutions to eradicate corrupt practices; and to undertake public education and awareness campaigns against corruption.[222] This three-pronged approach reflects a strategy that integrates enforcement with preventative measures and civic education.

A key aspect of the ICPC's work is its focus on prevention and systemic reform. As noted by Mlambo et al., ‘even though the ICPC might not be as visible as the EFCC, it plays a vital

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218 T.M Obamuyi and SO Olayiwola, ‘Corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria’ [2019] 35 *Journal of Economics and Management* 80, 95.

219 O.C Okunlola, ‘Political regime types and economic development in Nigeria: Significance of conflict and corruption’ [2019] 31(2) *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 183, 195.

220 *Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act, 2000*.

221 ibid, s 6(a).

222 ibid, s 6(b)-(c).

preventative role by tackling structural corruption, like inflated contracts and bureaucratic misconduct.'[223] This entails performing system analyses and evaluations of the operational methods of government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to pinpoint weaknesses that enable corruption, such as deficiencies in procurement systems, and to suggest corrective actions.[224] In this way, the ICPC functions as a corrective body aimed at improving governance systems, with the goal of limiting opportunities for corruption before they arise, instead of focusing exclusively on punitive measures after offences have been committed.

Nevertheless, the Commission's efficacy is substantially hampered by a major structural weakness: its overlapping jurisdiction with the EFCC. Both the ICPC Act and the EFCC Act criminalise similar offences, particularly those related to corruption and abuse of office.[225] This legislative overlap 'often results in duplicated efforts and confusion, which can hinder institutional coherence and operational efficiency.'[226] A prominent example was the dispute over the investigation of former Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, during which both agencies asserted jurisdiction, resulting in inter-agency competition and inefficient use of resources.[227] This duplication encourages forum shopping by defendants, generates operational tensions, and weakens accountability, ultimately eroding public trust in anti-corruption initiatives.

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223 DN Mlambo, MA Mubecua, SE Mpanza and VH Mlambo, 'Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa' (2019) 11(1) *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 39, 43.

224 *ICPC Act, 2000*, s 6(b).

225 A comparative reading of the *ICPC Act, 2000* and the *Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004* reveals overlaps in offences such as bribery, fraud, and abuse of office.

226 J.C Agu, FN Nkwo and RU Eneiga, 'Governance and anti-corruption measures in Nigeria: Strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability and public trust' (2024) 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1, 9.

227 See details of the case in "Alamieyeseigha and the Tangled Web of Corruption," *The Guardian (Nigeria)*, 15 November 2005.

Additionally, the ICPC has faced criticism for its low rate of convictions and a perceived reluctance to pursue high-profile, politically exposed individuals as assertively as the EFCC.[228] Although this may be partially attributed to its more measured, systems-focused methodology, it also indicates difficulties connected to financing, political autonomy, and a judiciary system characterised by delays. As a result, despite its important preventative role, the ICPC's ability to drive substantial reform is limited by jurisdictional uncertainties and a requirement for more tangible results in its enforcement actions.

3.1.4 Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act

The legal framework for upholding ethical standards among public office holders in Nigeria is established by the Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act, which gives effect to the constitutional provisions set out in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended).[229] This legislation creates a two-level structure: the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT). The Bureau is entrusted with the essential duty of collecting and preserving asset declarations from all public officials, as required by the Constitution.[230] Its role goes beyond mere record-keeping to include examining potential violations of the Code of Conduct for Public Officers and referring well-founded cases to the Tribunal for legal action.[231] The Tribunal, meanwhile, serves as a specialised judicial body with the power to hear referred cases, administer penalties, and command the forfeiture of assets gained through misconduct in office.[232]

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228 G.S.O Igiebor, 'Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic' (2019) 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493, 505.

229 *Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act*, Cap. C15, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004; *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)*, Fifth Schedule, Part I.

230 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)*, Third Schedule, Part I, §(c).

231 Ibid.

232 *Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act*, s 20.

The system's theoretical advantage rests in its capacity for prevention and openness. As Igiebor has emphasised, the CCB is vital for fostering transparency, 'especially by examining the financial disclosures of public servants.'[233] The obligation for public officials to declare assets upon assuming office, periodically during their service, and upon leaving office is meant to discourage illegal enrichment by establishing a checked financial starting point and to help uncover unjustified wealth.[234] This process is envisaged as an initial barrier against corruption, enabling the recognition and resolution of conflicts of interest and the illegal obtaining of assets before they become established.

Nonetheless, the practical effectiveness of the CCB and CCT has been met with considerable doubt from academics and the public alike. A major issue relates to the Bureau's apparent absence of political independence and its irregular application of the code. Valid questions have been raised regarding the Bureau's capacity to serve as an impartial monitor, especially concerning influential political persons, where enforcement appears inconsistent and potentially influenced by political motives.[235] This situation is worsened by its organisational position within the executive branch, which leads to claims of vulnerability to pressure, particularly involving senior figures in the governing party.[236]

Moreover, the enforcement procedure is frequently criticised for lacking strength and clarity. The checking of asset declarations is often seen as inactive and shallow, with little indication of vigorous, detailed audits to verify the accuracy of declarations against separately

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233 G.S.O Igiebor, 'Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic' [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493, 500

234 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)*, Fifth Schedule, Part I, §11.

235 M.O Okunola, A Umaru and S.I Hassan, 'Manifestations and impacts of corruption on democratic governance in Nigeria' (2019) 14(1) *International Journal of Development and Management Review* 164, 169.

236 A.O Adeniran, 'Anti-corruption strategies for balanced development: A case study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)' [2019] 5(1) *Advanced Journal of Social Science* 52, 59.

obtained information.[237] Even when cases are brought before the CCT, the results are often considered biased, with legal actions against well-connected individuals regularly concluding in not-guilty verdicts or being delayed endlessly, thus diminishing public trust.[238] As a result, although the CCB and CCT constitute a strong constitutional instrument for responsibility, their effectiveness is mostly unrealised, functioning as bodies whose decisions are seen to be influenced by political factors instead of being guided by a neutral dedication to moral governance.

3.1.5 Electoral Act 2022

The ultimate goal of truly democratic country is to conduct free and fair elections, The Nigerian government enacted Electoral Act 2022 introducing new changes such as using card readers and technological devices, reducing campaign expenses by the political parties, a time line for submitting list of candidates etc. however Nigeria is not known to have conducted free and fair elections.

The political and electoral scene in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the issue of political corruption. From how candidates are chosen to the funding of campaigns, the management of elections, and the appointments made in government, there are significant systemic flaws that have allowed corrupt practices to thrive. This not only undermines democratic values but also erodes the trust that citizens have in their leaders. These problems are made worse by weak institutions and the way the elite manipulate political systems, all of which help to solidify corrupt behaviors.

237 J.C Agu, FN Nkwo and RU Eneiga, 'Governance and anti-corruption measures in Nigeria: Strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability and public trust' [2024] 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1, 8.

238 See, for instance, the controversy surrounding the trial of the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Walter Onnoghen, at the CCT in 2019, which was widely criticised for its timing and perceived political motivation.

Electoral malpractices like vote trading, ballot rigging, voter suppression, and result manipulation have been a persistent issue in Nigeria's democratic landscape. Although the electoral process plays a crucial role in establishing good governance within a democratic society, it has gradually been compromised by political elites who have deliberately transformed it into a monetized process.[239] These dishonest tactics twist the electoral mandate, often putting power in the hands of those who can pay for it instead of those truly capable of leading. As noted by Okunola et al., elections have turned into transactional affairs where candidates see public office as a way to recoup the money they spent during campaigns, often through corrupt access to public resources.[240] This creates a damaging cycle that fosters a culture of impunity and self-serving governance.

The rampant issue of vote buying is closely tied to economic struggles, youth unemployment, and a lack of civic engagement, making voters more vulnerable to short-term bribes. Adagbabiri and Okolie highlight that this trend results in the rise of unqualified leaders, which weakens public institutions and leads to poor policymaking.[241] Consequently, the legitimacy of elected officials is undermined, diminishing the motivation for inclusive governance.

Vote buying in politics does not end with the party's primary election. It is further deployed by politicians and political parties to secure winning votes from the electorates. During the party's political campaign rally, a lot of materials and cash gifts usually described as empowerment programs or package are distributed to the people who attend the party's campaign rallies. Such purported empowerment programs or package are usualy deployed by the political

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239 J.O. Garuba, *An Examination of the Impacts of Vote Buying in the Electoral System of Nigeria* (2024) 7 *National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies Journal of Law Review*, 196–208.

240 Okunola, M. O., Umaru, A., & Hassan, S. I., 'Manifestations and impacts of corruption on democratic governance in Nigeria' [2019] 14(1) *International Journal of Development and Management Review* 164–174.

241 Adagbabiri, M. M., & Okolie, U. C., 'Corruption and the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria's fourth republic' [2018] 4(3) *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research* 41–56.

elites only during electioneering campaign period to influence the mind of the electorates to vote in a particular pattern which is now a norm in the country[242]. The most crucial of this scheme is what happens on the day of election where cash and gifts are shared to voters to compel them, even in the presense of the INEC officials.

To enhance the integrity of the electoral process and promote transparency and credibility in Nigeria's elections, the Electoral Act was amended to include penal provisions that criminalise the practice of vote buying.[243]

One of the major issues plaguing Nigeria's political landscape is the lack of regulation and transparency in campaign financing. Many political hopefuls turn to murky sources for funding, which can include money from illegal activities or backing from interest groups looking to gain influence after the elections. Igiebor points out that campaign financing has essentially become a means to launder dirty money, with sponsors expecting to reap political benefits once their chosen candidates take office.[244] This troubling trend not only leads to state capture but also undermines the very purpose of governance.

The weak enforcement of campaign finance laws allows candidates to spend excessively without facing any repercussions. On top of that, the lack of clear disclosure requirements makes it hard to hold anyone accountable financially, creating a breeding ground for corrupt practices in

242 J .O. Garuba, 'An Examination of the Impacts of Vote Buying in the Electoral System of Nigeria' [2024] 7 *National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies Journal of Law Review*, 199.

243 J.O. Garuba, 'An Examination of the Impacts of Vote Buying in the Electoral System of Nigeria' [2024] 7 *National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies Journal of Law Review*, 196–208.

244 Igiebor, G. S. O., 'Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic' [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493–513.

governance. Obamuyi and Olayiwola highlight that political corruption in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the financial systems that underpin the electoral process.[245]

3.6 Examination of the Role of the Electoral Body

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is Nigeria's main electoral authority, has been grappling with ongoing worries about its independence, logistical issues, and its struggle to enforce electoral regulations effectively. Aloko and Abdullahi point out that INEC's autonomy has frequently been undermined, allowing powerful political players to manipulate the system without much fear of repercussions.[246] Even with updates to the Electoral Act aimed at boosting transparency and accountability, the actual enforcement of these rules, especially those concerning campaign finance oversight and election dispute resolution, remains quite weak.

Although Nigeria's electoral process is regulated by law and overseen by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), each election cycle continues to be plagued by fraud and corrupt practices largely orchestrated by the political elite.[247] The judiciary plays a critical role in upholding the law and safeguarding it from subversion.[248] However, any failure by the judiciary to deliver justice fairly can have far-reaching consequences, undermining the growth of the electoral process, fuelling political unrest, and obstructing the realisation of good governance.[249]

INEC gets its legitimacy from *Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution* (as amended), with its main responsibilities clearly laid out in the Third Schedule, Part I, Item F. These duties include

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245 Obamuyi, T. M., & Olayiwola, S. O., 'Corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria' [2019] (35) *Journal of Economics and Management* 80–105.

246 Aloko, S. M., & Abdullahi, U., 'Corruption and underdevelopment in Nigeria: Challenges and solutions' [2018] 6(7) *Scientific Research Journal* 1–10.

247 J.O. Garuba, *Combating Electoral Fraud and Corruption in Nigeria: A Judicial Intervention* [2023] 2 *Godfrey Okoye University Law Journal* 303–330.

248 Ibid

249 Ibid

organizing and overseeing elections for both executive and legislative positions at the federal and state levels. Adding to this framework is the Electoral Act 2022, which details INEC's operational procedures and incorporates modern innovations like electronic result transmission and biometric accreditation systems to boost electoral transparency.

However, fulfilling these responsibilities is often hampered by ongoing systemic challenges. While the legal framework is designed to protect INEC's independence, its actual autonomy is often compromised by its reliance on the executive branch, especially when it comes to appointments and budget allocations. As Obamuyi and Olayiwola point out, these structural weaknesses hinder INEC's ability to operate fairly and effectively.[250]

3.6.1 The Challenges of the Electoral Body

One of the significant hurdles facing INEC is its limited financial and operational independence. Even though the commission's funding is supposed to come from the Consolidated Revenue Fund, the timing and method of disbursement can be influenced by the executive. Delays in accessing funds can disrupt essential preparatory tasks like voter education and logistics. Okunlola highlights that these delays aren't just bureaucratic issues; they may be intentionally created to undermine the commission's regulatory effectiveness.[251]

Moreover, the appointment of INEC's leadership is predominantly in the hands of the Presidency, raising concerns about impartiality and potential institutional capture. Folarin argues that

250 Obamuyi, T. M., and Olayiwola, S. O., 'Corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria' [2019] (35) *Journal of Economics and Management* 80–105.

251 Okunlola, O. C., 'Political regime types and economic development in Nigeria: Significance of conflict and corruption' [2019] 31(2) *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 183–216.

political administrations frequently appoint loyalists to senior positions within INEC, which compromises the commission's perceived neutrality and erodes public trust in its operations.[252]

Allegations of corruption within INEC have seriously damaged the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process. In some instances, electoral officers have been accused of taking bribes, manipulating results, or mishandling election materials. Igiebor highlights that the issue of manipulation isn't just about outside political players, there's also a troubling level of complicity among INEC officials that significantly undermines the integrity of elections.[253]

Moreover, the frequent announcements of "inconclusive elections," especially in closely contested races, have sparked considerable criticism. Many view these decisions as chances for political actors to sway results through unofficial channels, particularly in gubernatorial and senatorial elections.

To tackle concerns about credibility, INEC has begun modernizing election management with the help of technology. Innovations like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) have been rolled out to curb fraud and enhance transparency in the electoral process. While these advancements are certainly a step in the right direction, their success has been hampered by issues like inadequate infrastructure, technical problems, and fears of intentional sabotage. Mlambo et al. warn that while embracing technology is promising, it can't replace the need for institutional integrity and a strong political commitment.[254]

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252 Folarin, S., 'Corruption, politics and governance in Nigeria' in *Nigerian Politics* (2021) 377–394.

253 Igiebor, G. S. O., 'Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic' [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493–513.

254 Mlambo, D. N., et al., 'Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa' [2019] 11(1) *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 39–47.

Additionally, the inconsistent application of the Electoral Act has created loopholes that are often exploited. Aloko and Abdullahi point out that the failure to uniformly enforce electoral laws, particularly regarding campaign financing and vote buying, weakens INEC's ability to hold parties accountable.[255]

The operational issues and perceived political bias of INEC have really taken a toll on public trust in the electoral process. As Nurudeen and Staniewski pointed out, many Nigerians see elections as events that are already decided, manipulated by the interests of the elite.[256] The consistently low voter turnout in various electoral cycles reflects this widespread sense of disillusionment.

The perception that INEC favors the ruling political forces has divided public opinion and discouraged genuine participation from credible opposition figures and civic groups. This decline in trust not only undermines democratic engagement but also contributes to political instability.

To transform INEC into a credible and independent electoral body, we need significant reforms. First off, we should strengthen constitutional safeguards to ensure the commission has financial independence and that funds are released on time. Next, the process for appointing INEC leadership should be depoliticized by creating an independent selection panel made up of representatives from the judiciary, legislature, and civil society. Finally, we need to establish strong internal accountability mechanisms to keep an eye on and penalize corrupt behavior within the commission.

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255 Aloko, S. M., and Abdullahi, U., 'Corruption and underdevelopment in Nigeria: Challenges and solutions' [2018] 6(7) *Scientific Research Journal* 1–10.

256 Nurudeen, A., and Staniewski, W. M., 'Determinants of corruption in Nigeria: Evidence from various estimation techniques' [2019] 32(1) *Economic Research – Ekonomska Istraživanja* 3052–3076.

As Ajide and Olayiwola emphasized, the credibility of the electoral process is vital for the success of broader governance reforms.[257] Without transparent and fair elections managed by a truly independent commission, Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts could lose their legitimacy and effectiveness.

3.7 The Political Party System

Political parties are foundational to democratic practice, serving as platforms for citizen participation, policy direction, candidate endorsement, and leadership recruitment. However, in Nigeria, these roles have been significantly compromised by entrenched corruption. Rather than functioning as agents of reform and accountability, many parties operate as channels for patronage, elite control, and financial exploitation. This section explores how weak internal structures, obscure financing practices, and manipulative nomination systems enable corruption within Nigeria's party system.

3.7.1 Internal Democracy and Party Operations

Internal democracy in political parties is all about sticking to transparent, rule-based, and participatory decision-making. But in Nigeria, many parties are often under the thumb of powerful figures or "godfathers" who have a tight grip on key decisions like picking candidates and distributing resources. Igiebor points out that these influential players frequently twist party processes to favor those with financial or personal connections, which undermines merit and stifles grassroots participation.[258]

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[257] Ajide, F. M., and Olayiwola, J. A., 'Remittances and corruption in Nigeria' [2021] 23(1) *Journal of Economics and Development* 19–33.

[258] Igiebor, G. S. O., Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493–513.

This absence of internal democracy fosters a cycle of exclusion and a sense of illegitimacy. Party primaries are often marred by misconduct, everything from vote-buying to imposing candidates and fiddling with delegate lists. Such practices tarnish the democratic process, as political positions increasingly come to be viewed as a return on investment rather than a genuine call to serve. Okunlola argues that Nigerian parties have morphed into transactional entities, focusing more on profit than on ideology or governance principles.[259]

3.7.2 Campaign Finance and Political Patronage

Campaign financing stands out as one of the most crucial links between political parties and corruption in Nigeria. Running for office is a costly endeavor, and there's hardly any regulatory oversight on where the money comes from or how it's spent. This lack of scrutiny creates a perfect breeding ground for shady financing, ranging from embezzled public funds to corporate bribes and laundering of illicit gains. Otusanya and Lauwo contend that Nigeria's political finance scene remains largely informal, making it easy for vested interests to pull the strings.[260]

Investigations by agencies like the EFCC and ICPC have revealed cases where public resources were funneled into political campaigns. A prime example is the infamous arms procurement scandal of 2015, which uncovered billions misappropriated under the pretense of security spending but funneled into campaign funds.[261] These practices blur the lines between state responsibility and party politics, eroding public trust in governance.

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[259] Okunlola, O. C., Political regime types and economic development in Nigeria: Significance of conflict and corruption [2019] 31(2) *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 183–216.

[260] Otusanya, O. J., and Lauwo, S. G., Corruption and socio-political economic structures: a case of Nigeria [2019] 26(1) *Journal of Financial Crime* 330–371.

[261] Obamuyi, T. M., and Olayiwola, S. O., Corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria [2019] (35) *Journal of Economics and Management* 80–105.

Campaign donors are often rewarded with contracts, appointments, or regulatory favours once the party gains power, reinforcing a patronage system that incentivises corruption. Folarin explains that this quid pro quo culture institutionalises rent-seeking behaviour within Nigeria's political economy.[262]

3.7.3 Candidate Selection and the Role of Godfathers

In Nigeria, the way party candidates are chosen often has little to do with their skills or qualifications. Instead, it's largely influenced by political "godfathers", those powerful figures who handpick candidates in return for loyalty or future favors. This system stifles competition, pushes away reform-minded individuals, and keeps power firmly in the hands of a select few.

Mlambo et al. point out that this godfatherism undermines public accountability and ensures that leadership stays with a privileged elite.[263]

Additionally, the steep cost of nomination forms creates a financial hurdle for many, particularly women, young people, and those without access to wealth or influential networks. Nurudeen and Staniewski argue that this commercialization of political entry distorts democratic representation and fosters a culture where political positions are sought mainly for personal gain.[264]

3.7.4 Lack of Effective Regulatory Oversight

While the *Electoral Act 2022* has rules in place to regulate political party financing, the actual enforcement of these rules is quite weak. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is responsible for monitoring finances, often lacks the necessary strength and

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262 Folarin, S., (note 252) [2021] 377–394.

263 Mlambo, D. N., Mubecua, M. A., Mpanza, S. E., and Mlambo, V. H., 'Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa' [2019] 11(1) *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 39–47.

264 Nurudeen, A., and Staniewski, W. M., 'Determinants of corruption in Nigeria: Evidence from various estimation techniques' [2019] 32(1) *Economic Research – Ekonomska Istraživanja* 3052–3076.

independence to hold parties accountable. Ajide and Olayiwola stress that the failure to penalize breaches of campaign finance regulations only encourages ongoing misconduct and erodes public trust in the electoral process.[265]

Moreover, political parties frequently ignore the legal obligation to submit annual financial reports to INEC, and there's a significant lack of transparency regarding their income and spending. The absence of enforcement and consequences for non-compliance highlights a broader issue of institutional impunity within the political landscape.

3.8 The Judiciary

The judiciary in Nigeria holds a constitutionally mandated responsibility to interpret laws, safeguard fundamental rights, and act as an impartial arbiter in all legal matters, including those relating. to political corruption, its role cannot be ov er emphasised. Ideally, it should serve as a central pillar in efforts to hold public officeholders accountable. However, its potential has been repeatedly undermined by internal inefficiencies, external interference, institutional weaknesses, and corruption within the system itself.

3.8.1 Judicial Role in Corruption Prosecution

In Nigeria's fight against corruption, the judiciary plays a vital role. It's tasked with interpreting key laws like the *Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act*, *the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act,* and the *Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act*. These laws empower the courts to take action against both public officials and private individuals involved in corrupt activities. *Folarin* points out that

[265] Ajide, F. M., and Olayiwola, J. A., Remittances and corruption in Nigeria [2021] 23(1) *Journal of Economics and Development* 19–33..

the judiciary has occasionally made significant rulings that bolster the idea of accountability in governance.[266]

However, despite some advancements, many high-profile corruption cases, especially those involving former governors, ministers, and political party leaders, have been mired in lengthy legal battles, dismissed on technicalities, or left unresolved after appeals. Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga note that while special tribunals have been established to speed up these cases, actual convictions are still rare, highlighting deep-rooted inefficiencies in both the prosecution process and the judiciary's resolve.[267]

3.8.2 Political Influence and Structural Limitations

One of the persistent threats to the integrity of the judiciary is political interference. The executive branch often influences judicial appointments, promotions, and budget decisions, which raises concerns about the independence of the judiciary. Okunlola explains that this kind of interference undermines the judiciary's impartiality and affects the handling of politically sensitive cases.[268]

Moreover, the judiciary itself has not been free from corruption. There have been numerous reports of judicial officers accepting bribes, issuing politically motivated rulings, or engaging in unethical behavior. Otusanya and Lauwo argue that this internal corruption damages public trust

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266 Folarin, S., *Corruption, politics and governance in Nigeria*, in *Nigerian Politics* (2021) 377–394.

267 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., & Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and anti-corruption measures in Nigeria: Strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability and public trust' [2024] 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1–15.

268 Okunlola, O. C., Political regime types and economic development in Nigeria: Significance of conflict and corruption [2019] 31(2) *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 183–216.

in the justice system and creates a loophole for corrupt elites who can manipulate legal outcomes to their advantage.[269]

The judiciary's credibility is further challenged when courts are perceived as partisan instruments rather than neutral institutions. Igiebor notes that public trust diminishes significantly when politically charged cases, especially election-related disputes, appear to reflect political bias instead of legal merit.[270]

3.9.3 Institutional Inefficiencies and Delayed Proceedings

Aside from political manipulation, the Nigerian judiciary grapples with several operational shortcomings that delay the delivery of justice. These issues include overcrowded court schedules, outdated recordkeeping practices, and a shortage of qualified legal professionals. Nurudeen and Staniewski point out that these logistical hurdles are often taken advantage of by defendants, who intentionally use procedural tactics like adjournments and interlocutory injunctions to stall proceedings.[271]

Moreover, while plea bargaining is legally accepted, it has faced criticism for favoring those with influence. Uddin and Rahman contend that the improper use of plea deals leads to lenient sentences that erode public trust in the justice system and foster a sense of impunity among politically connected offenders.[272]

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269 Otusanya, O. J., and Lauwo, S. G., Corruption and socio-political economic structures: a case of Nigeria [2019] 26(1) *Journal of Financial Crime* 330–371.

270 Igiebor, G. S. O., Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493–513.

271 Nurudeen, A., and Staniewski, W. M., 'Determinants of corruption in Nigeria: Evidence from various estimation techniques' [2019] 32(1) *Economic Research – Ekonomska Istraživanja* 3052–3076.

272 Uddin, I., and Rahman, K. U., 'Impact of corruption, unemployment and inflation on economic growth: Evidence from developing countries' [2023] 57(3) *Quality & Quantity* 2759–2779.

3.9.4 Promoting Judicial Accountability

Despite these challenges, the judiciary is still a crucial player in the battle against political corruption. Its function in interpreting laws, safeguarding civil liberties, and holding state actors accountable is essential. Mlambo et al. highlight that in many post-colonial African nations, a fair and competent judiciary serves not only as a check on power but also as a protector of investigative journalism and whistleblowers.[273]

At times, the judiciary has taken on a progressive role, such as when it enforced the *Freedom of Information Act 2011,* which mandates public institutions to release documents that can support anti-corruption efforts. Courts have also made decisions to uphold the independence of anti-corruption agencies and limit executive interference. However, for these positive outcomes to truly matter, such rulings need to be consistently applied and integrated into the system.

3.9.5 Proposed Reforms and the Way Forward

To truly transform the judiciary into a powerful tool for tackling political corruption, we need to embrace some serious reforms. This means giving the judiciary complete financial independence to lessen the grip of the executive branch, establishing clear and fair criteria for judicial appointments based on merit, digitizing court processes to speed things up, and creating performance-based evaluations for judges. Adeniran emphasized that for Nigeria's fight against corruption to succeed, we must have a credible, independent, and efficient judiciary that isn't swayed by political interests.[274]

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273 Mlambo, D. N., Mubecua, M. A., Mpanza, S. E., and Mlambo, V. H., 'Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa' [2019] 11(1) *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 39–47.

274 Adeniran, A. O., 'Anti-corruption strategies for balanced development: A case study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)' [2019] 5(1) *Advanced Journal of Social Science* 52–64.

3.10 Comparative Analysis

Addressing political corruption effectively requires more than domestic reforms; it demands learning from international examples where anti-corruption efforts have yielded varying results. This section compares Singapore, a global benchmark in institutional integrity, with Rwanda, a fellow African democracy with strong legal system. By examining the institutional strategies, successes, and limitations in both countries, Nigeria can derive practical lessons for improving its anti-corruption framework.

3.10.1 Singapore: A Model of Integrity and Decisive Governance

Singapore's transformation from a nation riddled with corruption in the 1960s to one of the most transparent countries globally is largely credited to its steadfast political resolve, strong legal framework, and empowered anti-corruption agencies. Central to this system is the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), which reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office. The CPIB has extensive authority to investigate corruption at all levels of government and society, free from outside interference. Unlike many developing nations, Singapore applies its anti-corruption laws even to high-ranking officials, showcasing a firm stance against misconduct.[275]

A key element of Singapore's strategy is the alignment of its laws with administrative policies. The Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) clearly defines corrupt activities and shifts the burden of proof onto those accused to explain any unexplained wealth. At the same time, Singapore has enhanced its public service through reforms that include competitive salaries, performance-based assessments, and merit-based promotions, which help reduce the temptation for corruption.[276]

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275 Otusanya, O. J., & Lauwo, S. G., 'Corruption and socio-political economic structures: a case of Nigeria' [2019] 26(1) *Journal of Financial Crime* 330–371.

276 Okunlola, O. C., Political regime types and economic development in Nigeria: Significance of conflict and corruption [2019] 31(2) *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 183–216.

Moreover, Singapore's success in fighting corruption hinges on effective prosecution, consistent enforcement of rules, and a societal attitude that rejects corruption. In stark contrast, Nigeria grapples with significant hurdles such as politically motivated trial delays, selective justice, and rampant impunity for the powerful. Igiebor points out that a lack of political will and internal sabotage within Nigeria's institutions often allows politically exposed individuals to evade accountability.[277] While Singapore's model is deeply rooted in its unique political history, it illustrates how cohesive institutions and strong deterrents are essential in the fight against corruption.

3.10.2 Rwanda: Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Institutional Discipline

Rwanda presents a noteworthy illustration of anti-corruption success on the African continent, particularly as a nation that emerged from conflict and has since experienced comprehensive political, legal, and institutional renewal. Following the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, the country undertook a rigorous state reconstruction process, marked by a declared zero-tolerance stance on corruption, firm administrative enforcement, and a focus on development driven by state planning. In contrast to other countries in the region, including Nigeria, Rwanda has implemented a governance model that centres on transparency, efficiency rooted in technocratic principles, and strong institutional coordination.[278]

A cornerstone of Rwanda's anti-corruption architecture is the Office of the Ombudsman, an autonomous body with the responsibility of detecting, investigating, and preventing corrupt practices at all levels of government. Supporting this institutional framework are initiatives such as compulsory asset declarations for public servants, strict regulation of procurement processes,

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277 Igiebor, G. S. O., 'Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic' [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493–513.

278 Hope, Sr, K. R. The corruption and sustainable development nexus in Africa: A contemporary review and analysis. *Journal of Financial Crime,* 31(2), 331–346.

and the introduction of Imihigo, performance contracts that link government officials' responsibilities with tangible, measurable outputs.[279] These initiatives, underpinned by strong political commitment and legitimacy, have placed Rwanda among Africa's least corrupt nations, as consistently reflected in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.[280]

The Rwandan strategy strongly prioritises preventive over reactive approaches. Government institutions are subject to continuous oversight, while anti-corruption education has become a core component of public service training and community outreach. Officials implicated in misconduct, including those in senior positions, are promptly dismissed and prosecuted, reinforcing accountability across the board.[281] Though some critics point to the centralised and hierarchical nature of Rwanda's governance, its effectiveness in addressing entrenched corruption is widely recognised.[282]

By comparison, Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies, including the EFCC, ICPC, and the Code of Conduct Bureau, operate in a more fragmented and politically charged environment. These bodies frequently struggle with interference from political actors, legislative ambiguities, and institutional misalignment, which hinder their effectiveness. As highlighted by Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga, without securing their autonomy, boosting their financial capacity, and introducing

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279 Transparency International Rwanda. [2022]. *National integrity system assessment*. Retrieved from https://www.transparency.org.rw/publications

280 Transparency International. [2023]. *Corruption Perceptions Index*. Retrieved from https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023

281 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2021). *Country review report of Rwanda under UNCAC implementation review mechanism*. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org

282 Mlambo, D. N., Mubecua, M. A., Mpanza, S. E., & Mlambo, V. H. Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa. [2019] *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies*, 11(1), 39–47.

credible performance benchmarks, Nigeria's anti-corruption institutions may remain largely ineffective.[283]

Ultimately, Rwanda's approach highlights the critical role of strategic leadership, independent institutions, and outcome-driven governance in combatting political corruption. Although Nigeria's socio-political context is broader and more pluralistic, Rwanda's experience proves that meaningful reforms, when guided by political resolve and institutional coherence, can significantly enhance integrity within the public sector. Applying comparable principles in Nigeria, such as depoliticising institutional appointments, embedding accountability systems, and measuring performance rigorously, could help dismantle long-standing corruption networks.

3.10.3 Implications for Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Reforms

The nation's approach to anti-corruption campaign may seem not to be totally adequate enough to combat the scourge of political corruption in Nigeria. It is imperative therefore, for the nation to take a careful study and review of how Singapore and Rwanda have contended against corruption in their environment with a view to seeing how it can perhaps adopt and/or adapt some of the initiatives in those countries, such as having an well remunerated civil and public service, an enduring independent anti-corruption agencies, a free judicial system, an independent press and active civil society.[284]

In summary, while no anti-corruption model is universally transferable, Singapore and Rwanda offer complementary insights for Nigeria. The former highlights the benefits of institutional

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283 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., & Eneiga, R. U. [2024]. Governance and anti-corruption measures in Nigeria: Strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability and public trust. *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy*, 8(1), 1–15.

284 Adeniran, A. O., Anti-corruption strategies for balanced development: A case study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) [2019] 5(1) *Advanced Journal of Social Science* 52–64; Kediehor, C., Williams, A., Ohikhena, P., & Robert, E., The mass media, whistle blowing laws, and corruption in Nigeria [2020] 4(2) *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research* 1–13.

discipline and strong political leadership, while the latter illustrates the importance of citizen vigilance and judicial independence in navigating political complexity.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPACT OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION ON NIGERIA'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Analysis of Political Corruption in Nigeria

4.1.1 Political Corruption in the Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, political corruption is often seen as the deliberate misuse of public power or official roles for personal, group, or political gain.[285] It goes beyond just illegally amassing wealth; it also involves manipulating political systems to maintain control, weaken accountability, and erode democratic foundations.[286] Corruption is deeply rooted in both formal institutions and informal political practices across all levels of governance, from local governments to national authorities.

Historically, political corruption in Nigeria has followed a predictable pattern, with those in power regularly taking advantage of public resources to enrich themselves and sustain

285 Igiebor, G. S. O., 'Political corruption in Nigeria: Implications for economic development in the fourth republic' [2019] 35(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 493–513.

286 Otusanya, O. J., & Lauwo, S. G., 'Corruption and socio-political economic structures: a case of Nigeria' [2019] 26(1) *Journal of Financial Crime* 330–371.

networks of patronage.[287] Many view public office not as a means to serve the community, but as an opportunity for personal gain and access to lucrative privileges.[288] This mindset is further fueled by weak institutional framework, as regulatory and oversight bodies often struggle with inadequate funding, lack of independence, or are subject to political meddling.[289]

Moreover, this issue goes beyond individual moral failings; it reflects deeper structural and systemic problems.[290] These include poor enforcement of laws, law enforcement agencies that are politically compromised, and widespread poverty, which leaves many voters susceptible to manipulation and coercion.[291] According to Obamuyi and Olayiwola, corruption in Nigeria has become a widespread norm, entrenched over decades of military rule, political instability, and flawed democratic practices.[292]

4.1.2 Key Characteristics of Political Corruption in Nigeria

Political corruption in Nigeria is characterized by several key features, such as the takeover of public institutions, a culture of impunity, rent-seeking behavior, and the strategic manipulation by powerful elites.

Institutional capture refers to the way public bodies, which are supposed to act in the interest of the public, are instead hijacked by political elites for their own private or party-specific goals. In Nigeria, this often shows up through the appointment of loyalists to critical positions within anti-

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287 Ibid.

288 Ojo, L. B. et al., *Political Corruption, Income Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria* [2020] 13(1) *Acta Universitatis Danubius. Relationes Internationales*.

289 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N. and Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures in Nigeria: Strategies for Enhancing Transparency, Accountability and Public Trust' [2024] 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy*.

290 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 286) 330–371.

291 Okunola, M. O. et al., 'Manifestations and Impacts of Corruption on Democratic Governance in Nigeria' [2019] 14(1) *International Journal of Development and Management Review* 183.

292 Obamuyi, T. M., and Olayiwola, S. O., Corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria [2019] (35) *Journal of Economics and Management* 80–105. (note) 80.

corruption agencies, electoral commissions, and the judiciary.[293] As a result, these institutions, rather than serving as checks on power, turn into tools for solidifying political control and silencing opposition.[294]

Impunity is another major aspect, where individuals in public office can engage in corrupt activities. The legal system often plays a role in this, as corruption trials are frequently stalled by procedural delays, lengthy litigation, and a lack of accountability within the judiciary. As *Igiebor* points out, many high-profile cases involving senior politicians end without any significant convictions.[295] This absence of deterrence fosters an environment where corrupt practices become commonplace and go unchallenged.

Rent-seeking, which is the act of acquiring wealth without contributing to productivity, is also rampant in Nigeria's political landscape. Public policies are often crafted and executed primarily to create opportunities for rent extraction, rather than to benefit the public.[296] Licenses, government contracts, and revenue distributions, especially from oil, are typically awarded based on political connections rather than merit or a competitive process.[297] Ajide and Olayiwola emphasize that such practices hinder market efficiency and discourage investment in innovation and entrepreneurship.[298]

Elite manipulation is a key player in keeping systemic corruption alive and kicking. Political elites often take advantage of religious and ethnic divides to strengthen their electoral

293 Ojeka, S. et al., 'Corruption Perception, Institutional Quality and Performance of Listed Companies in Nigeria' (2019) 5(10) *Heliyon*.
294 Igiebor (note 285) 493–513.
295 Ibid
296 Otusanya (note 286) 330–371.
297 Aloko, S. M. and Abdullahi, U., 'Corruption and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: Challenges and Solutions' [2018] 6(7) *Scientific Research Journal*.
298 Ajide, F. M. and Olayiwola, J. A., 'Remittances and Corruption in Nigeria' [2021] 23(1) *Journal of Economics and Development* 19.

power and divert public's attention away from accountability issues.[299] They frequently rely on patronage networks and vote-buying to sway elections and gain legitimacy, not by delivering results, but through a system of transactional politics.[300] According to Otusanya and Lauwo, this creates a "closed political economy" where corruption becomes so ingrained that it resists any attempts at reform.[301]

All these factors show that political corruption in Nigeria is deeply woven into the fabric of the country's governance. It undermines institutional integrity, chips away at citizen trust, hinders development, and weakens democratic accountability. The consequences are far-reaching, affecting everything from the credibility of elections and the independence of the judiciary to macroeconomic management and national unity.

4.1.3 Common Manifestations in Nigeria

Political corruption in Nigeria shows up in various deep-rooted practices that undermine democratic institutions, disrupt fiscal responsibility, and challenge the rule of law. Common examples include bribing voters, manipulating elections, misusing funds, offering bribes, making biased appointments, and inflating public contract prices. Each of these actions feeds into a cycle of impunity and weak institutions, which ultimately hampers national progress and erodes public trust.

4.1.3.1 Inducement of Voters and Electoral Manipulation

One of the most obvious signs of political corruption is when voters are bribed, with cash, food, or other perks being traded for their votes. Vote buying, when wielded by political elites,

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299 Folarin, S., *Corruption, politics and governance in Nigeria*, in *Nigerian Politics*, [2021]: 377–394.
300 Okunola, M. O. et al., (note 291) 164.
301 Otusanya, O. J. and Lauwo, S. G., (note 286) 330.

serves to undermine the integrity of the electoral process; permitting this practice to persist poses a serious threat to national progress and development.[302] This practice has become alarmingly common in Nigeria's federal, state, and local elections.[303] Politicians often choose to resort to these bribes instead of engaging with voters through meaningful discussions about policies or ideologies. This not only damages the integrity of elections but also deepens clientelism and diminishes the electorate's ability to hold their leaders accountable.[304] It is important to recognise that when an electoral process is tainted by fraud and corruption, it effectively undermines the people's ability to genuinely exercise their civic right to elect their leaders.[305]

Electoral manipulation, which can involve stealing ballot boxes, impersonating voters, falsifying election results, and messing with the voter register, often goes hand in hand with vote-buying.[306] These shady practices are usually carried out by political operatives, often in cohort with security forces or compromised electoral officials. The fallout from this includes a decline in public trust in elections and the rise of leaders who lack genuine democratic legitimacy.[307]

4.1.3.2 Misappropriation of Funds and Bribery

The misuse of public resources, especially embezzlement, continues to be a major hurdle for national development. It is not uncommon for high-ranking government officials to be involved in diverting funds meant for public services into their own pockets. They often achieve this through inflated budgets, fake projects, or shady contract dealings.[308] The resulting

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302 J.O. Garuba, 'Combating Electoral Fraud and Corruption in Nigeria: A Judicial Intervention' [2023] 2 *Godfrey Okoye University Law Journal* 303–330.
303 Ojo, L. B., Eusebius, A. C., Ifeanyi, O. J. and Aderemi, T. A., (note 288)
304 Okunola, M. O., Umaru, A. and Hassan, S. I., (note 291) *Review* 164.
305 Ibid.
306 Otusanya, O. J. and Lauwo, (note 291) 330.
307 Igiebor, (note 285) 493.
308 Ojeka, (note 293)

misallocation of funds has a serious negative effect on essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure.[309]

Bribery is also rampant in Nigeria's political and administrative landscape. It has become a standard practice for securing contracts, speeding up approvals, or swaying judicial outcomes.[310] As noted by Ojeka and others, bribery has significantly warped procurement processes and licensing systems, favoring those who are willing to offer kickbacks over those who are genuinely qualified.[311] This not only distorts fair competition but also drives up project costs, as bribes are factored into the overall expenses of contracts.

4.1.3.3 Preferential Appointments (Nepotism)

Preferential treatment in public appointments, often referred to as nepotism, is a serious issue that cannot ignored. There are situations where individuals are engaged in public office not on the basis of merit but purely on either family backgrounds or connections, ethnic affiliation and/or political ties, with little or no reference to competence, skills or qualifications.[312] This practice not only undermines the principle of merit-based it erodes due process and transparency in the selection or engagement of public officials or servants. This ultimately hampers the effectiveness of the public sector and deepens ethnic and regional divides. Moreover, it fuels public distrust regarding the fairness and professionalism of our state institutions.[313] This corrupt practice is common place in the nation's public sector being elective or appointive position.

4.1.3.4 Inflation of Contract Values

309 Abubakar, S., 'Institutional Quality and Economic Growth: Evidence from Nigeria' [2020] 8(1) *African Journal of Economic Review* 48.

235 Augustine, A. A. and Enyi, E. P., "Control of Corruption, Trust in Government, and Voluntary Tax Compliance in South-West, Nigeria" *Management Studies* [2020] 8(1) 84.

311 Ojogiwa (note 236) 83.

312 Nurudeen, A. and Staniewski, M. W., 'Determinants of Corruption in Nigeria: Evidence from Various Estimation Techniques' (2019) 32(1) *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja* 3052.

313 Folarin (note 299) 377.

Another particularly harmful type of corruption is the inflation of government contract prices. Public projects are often awarded at inflated costs, typically to companies with ties to political figures.[314] The extra money is then funneled through shady deals, like kickbacks or shell companies.[315] This leads to abandoned projects or infrastructure that does not meet standards, along with unsustainable public spending. As Otusanya and Lauwo pointed out, these inflationary practices are a clear example of the rent-seeking culture that is deeply rooted in Nigeria's political landscape.[316]

All of these forms of political corruption contribute to weak governance, ineffective public services, and unequal socio-economic opportunities. They reveal a systemic failure in regulatory enforcement and underscore the urgent need for comprehensive institutional reform to restore integrity to Nigeria's democratic and development processes.

4.1.4 Notable Instances of Political Corruption in Nigeria

Several landmark corruption cases in Nigeria have sparked intense public discussions and revealed the deep-rooted issues of political misconduct. These high-profile scandals, spanning from the illegal siphoning of public funds to fraudulent procurement process, highlight the flaws in governance and oversight systems, as well as the limited effectiveness of institutional attempts to combat corruption. An attempt will be made to examine a few of such situation in the history of the nation.

4.1.4.2 Fuel Subsidy Scam

314 Aloko (note 297)

315 Adeniran, A. O., Anti-corruption strategies for balanced development: A case study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) [2019] 5(1) *Advanced Journal of Social Science* 52.

316 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 286) 330.

The corruption tied to Nigeria's fuel subsidy system is one of the most significant economic frauds in the nation's history. The scheme originally designed to reduce domestic fuel prices by reimbursing marketers for import expenses, the scheme turned into a channel for extensive financial misconduct. By 2012, investigations by the National Assembly and the EFCC uncovered that many companies had deceitfully claimed subsidy payments for fuel that was either never delivered or falsely invoiced.[317] It is estimated that around ₦1.7 trillion (roughly $10.6 billion at that time) was misappropriated.[318]

Further inquiries revealed a troubling collusion between politically connected individuals and major regulatory agencies. This scandal sparked widespread protests under the "Occupy Nigeria" movement and intensified demands for transparency in public finances.[319] It highlighted how entrenched interests could exploit fiscal systems for personal gain, ultimately undermining both economic governance and public trust.

4.1.4.3 Dasuki Arms Procurement Scandal (Dasukigate)

In 2015, it became public knowledge that a huge sum of money intended for procurement of military hardware and other security expenditure was diverted or misappropriated and embezzled by the supposed procuring entity or officer at the time, an act that exposes the nation's security and defence apparatus. The former National Security Adviser, Col. Sambo Dasuki, was alleged to have misappropriated or diverted a whopping sum of $2.1 billion that was meant to procure military hardware or weapons and other logistics to prosecute the war against Boko Haram insurgency into unrelated matters.[320] Some of these money which was removed from the

317 Obamuyi (note 292) 80.
318 Okunola (note 291) 164.
319 Nurudeen, A. and Staniewski, M. W., 'Determinants of Corruption in Nigeria: Evidence from Various Estimation Techniques' [2019] 32(1) *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja* 3052.
320 Ojo,Eusebius, feanyi and Aderemi, (note 288)

nation's treasury, the Excess Crude Account, were shared amongst senior politicians, party operatives, and media figures.[321]

This scandal really highlighted how national security funds can be misused for political gain, especially in a system where defense budgets are not subject to the usual auditing processes.[322] Even with the public outrage and several prosecutions, only a handful of people have actually been convicted, which has only fueled the belief in selective justice and the weakness of the institutions.[323]

4.1.4.4 Pension Reform Fraud

The pension sector has faced its share of corruption challenges. A particularly shocking case involved the Pension Reform Task Team (PRTT), led by Abdulrasheed Maina, who was accused of misappropriating over ₦100 billion that was intended for federal pensioners.[324] This fraudulent scheme included creating fake beneficiaries, unauthorized transfers, and amassing luxury properties both in Nigeria and abroad.[325]

Even though Maina was convicted in 2021, the circumstances of his reinstatement into the civil service, despite being a fugitive, raised serious concerns about possible high-level complicity.[326] This case highlights the devastating impact of bureaucratic corruption on vulnerable groups, especially elderly pensioners who depended on the system for their survival.

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321 Adeniran, A. O., 'Anti-Corruption Strategies for Balanced Development: A Case Study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)' [2019] 5(1) *Advanced Journal of Social Science* 52.
322 Ojeka, (note 293)
323 Igiebor (note 285) 493.
324 Otusanya and lauwo (note 286) 330.
325 Mlambo, D. N., Mubecua, M. A., Mpanza, S. E., & Mlambo, V. H. Corruption and its implications for development and good governance: A perspective from post-colonial Africa. [2019] *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies*, 11(1), 39–47
326 Olujobi (note 255) 1.

These incidents are not just isolated events; they reveal the systemic issues that allow corruption to thrive in Nigeria's political environment. They also emphasize the urgent need for stronger accountability measures, independent oversight, and reforms that ensure anti-corruption efforts are not only sustained but also free from political manipulation.

4.1.5 Public Disposition and the Societal Internalisation of Corruption

The ongoing issue of political corruption in Nigeria goes far beyond just weak institutions and the complicity of the elite; it is also deeply rooted in how society views these issues and the cultural norms that surround them. A prime example of this is the popular saying "Chop I Chop," which reflects a kind of societal acceptance of using public office for personal gain, as long as some of those benefits trickle down to supporters.[327] This phrase highlights a troubling shift in public morals, where corrupt actions are not just overlooked but almost expected as part of an unspoken agreement between politicians and the people they serve.

This acceptance of corruption has deep historical ties to patron-client relationships, political clientelism, and widespread economic hardship. Instead of being judged on their integrity or the effectiveness of their policies, politicians are often evaluated based on their ability to deliver immediate, tangible rewards, like cash handouts, job opportunities, or lucrative contracts, to their supporters.[328] This transactional view of governance encourages the misappropriation of funds, as those in power justify diverting public money as long as they meet the obligations to their patrons. It creates a cycle of complicity that further erodes accountability.

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327 Igiebor, (note 285) 493

328 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 286) 330.

Research has shown that this lenient societal attitude is linked to persistent poverty and economic disenfranchisement.[329] In a context where basic needs are unmet and formal welfare systems are lacking, many people see corrupt politicians not as wrongdoers but as savvy individuals who have managed to navigate a flawed system.[330] This view is reinforced by the government's inability to provide essential services, making the private generosity or public displays of wealth from corrupt figures seem like the only form of support or development available in their communities.

The issue is further complicated by the influence of religious and traditional leaders, who often play a role, whether directly or indirectly, in legitimizing corruption. It is not unusual for those involved in major corruption scandals to be honored with titles, celebrated in religious gatherings, or praised for their charitable contributions.[331] These actions send a message that society accepts wealth, no matter how it was acquired, equating financial success with respect and status. This creates a cultural backdrop that not only tolerates but also encourages unethical behavior in public service.

Moreover, efforts to combat corruption are stifled by a fragile civic framework and a lack of public involvement. Civil society groups, the media, and grassroots initiatives frequently encounter repression, co-option, or neglect from institutions, limiting their ability to confront deep-rooted corruption or to inform the public about governance matters.[332] As a result, many people disengage from political processes, feeling that anti-corruption initiatives are either

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329 Ojo, (note 288)
330 Okunlola (note 291) 183.
331 Mlambo,Mubecua, Mpanza and Mlambo (note) 32539.
332 Kediehor, C., Williams, A., Ohikhena, P. and Robert, E., 'The Mass Media, Whistle Blowing Laws, and Corruption in Nigeria' [2020] 4(2) *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research* 1.

pointless or too risky. This atmosphere of indifference and fear weakens democratic engagement and diminishes the push for institutional change.

In the end, the societal acceptance of corruption in Nigeria must be seen as both a consequence and a catalyst of political dysfunction. As *Igiebor* insightfully points out, political corruption in Nigeria is not just a legal issue; it is a social reality woven into daily life and expectations.[333] Tackling this deeply rooted challenge will require more than just new laws or vigorous prosecutions. It calls for a long-term approach focused on cultural change, emphasizing civic education, public accountability, and a reimagining of what ethical leadership looks like.

4.2.1 Political Corruption during the Colonial and Pre-Independence Period

The roots of political corruption in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial and pre-independence periods. During this time, the British colonial administration sets up governance structures that were often exploitative, hierarchical, and lacked accountability. While these institutions were supposedly designed to maintain order and improve administrative efficiency, they actually encouraged exploitative practices and paved the way for corrupt behaviors that became deeply ingrained in Nigeria's political culture after independence.

From 1861 to 1960, political power was concentrated in the hands of British colonial officers and their chosen African intermediaries. A significant governance approach, particularly in Northern Nigeria, was the system of indirect rule. This system allowed colonial administrators to wield power through traditional rulers who were compliant with British interests. Although this method seemed to maintain a connection with local authority systems, it often involved the strategic selection or elevation of traditional leaders who aligned with colonial goals. This created an

333 Igiebor (note 285) 493.

environment of favoritism and personal access to state power, turning public office into a means for personal gain rather than a platform for serving the public.[334]

The main goal of colonial administration was to exploit Nigeria's natural resources for the benefit of the British Empire. Infrastructure like railways and ports was built primarily to transport valuable commodities such as palm oil, tin, and cocoa back to Britain. Unfortunately, the local labour and public funds used for these extractive projects rarely saw any significant reinvestment in the local economy. This legacy fostered a perception of governance as inherently exploitative and created a model of leadership that was disconnected from developmental responsibilities or accountability to the people.[335]

In Nigeria, where opportunities for citizens to engage in governance are quite limited, alternative ways to exert political influence and ensure survival have emerged, often based on patronage and informal networks. Those Nigerians who landed civil service or political roles during the colonial era often mirrored the exploitative practices they observed. As Forrest points out, these early political elites leveraged their positions to hand out favors, appointments, and contracts in exchange for loyalty and political backing.[336] Over time, these behaviors morphed into the patron-client networks that are prevalent in Nigeria politics today.

Colonial governance also set the stage for a lack of transparency. Decisions, especially regarding budget allocations and administrative appointments, were made behind closed doors, with little to no public involvement or oversight.[337] This lack of openness stifled the growth of civic values like accountability, participation, and democratic legitimacy. Mlambo and his colleagues argue that the colonial legacy in Nigeria and other parts of Africa led to post-independence political

334 Otusanya (note 286) 330–371.
335 Mlambo, Mubecua, Mpanza and Mlambo (note 315) 39–47.
336 Forrest, T., *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria: Updated Edition*, (Routledge, 2019), ch 1.
337 Aloko (note 297) 1–10.

systems that struggled with public legitimacy and were inherently inclined toward authoritarianism and power abuse.[338]

By the mid-20th century, as nationalist movements began to gain momentum, some new Nigerian political figures started to adopt the corrupt practices of their colonial predecessors. The shift to self-governance in the 1940s and 1950s, under constitutional frameworks like the Richards Constitution (1946) and the Macpherson Constitution (1951), opened up new avenues for local political elites to engage in rent-seeking.[339] While these constitutions expanded African political participation, they also allowed for regional allocations and appointments that were frequently manipulated for political patronage.[340]

The competition among regional leaders with ethnic ties has added a layer of ethno-regionalism to the corruption scene. Political figures have increasingly funneled state resources to support their own ethnic or regional groups, weaving corruption into the fabric of identity politics.[341] This trend signified the early politicization of public office, where state power was wielded as a means for regional supremacy and political strengthening.

Additionally, the colonial legal and administrative systems were missing the necessary tools to effectively tackle corruption. Although there were some guidelines for civil servants, enforcement was often inconsistent or arbitrary. Colonial rule valued order and loyalty far more than integrity or accountability.[342] Consequently, acts of bribery, favouritism, and financial misconduct were frequently ignored, especially when they involved individuals connected to colonial interests.

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338 Mlambo et al. (note 325) 41.
339 Otusanya, O. J. and Lauwo, S. G., (note 286) 330–371.
340 Okunlola (note 291) 183–216.
341 Obamuyi (note 292) 80–105.
342 Abubakar, (note 309) 48–64.

In short, the colonial and pre-independence period in Nigeria was marked by practices that normalized favoritism, institutionalized exploitation, and allowed for the abuse of public office. These behaviours fostered a culture of administrative impunity and established informal norms that would later support systemic corruption in independent Nigeria. The link between colonial and post-colonial governance shows that corruption in Nigeria stems from both flawed institutional framework and individual moral shortcomings.[343]

4.2.2 The First Republic (1960–1966) and Military Coups

Allegations of Regional Corruption and Electoral Manipulation

Nigeria's First Republic, which kicked off with the country's independence in 1960, was initially filled with hope for unity and economic growth. Unfortunately, this period soon became marked by rampant political corruption, growing regional divides, and widespread electoral fraud.[344] The issues stemming from colonial rule did not just continue; they seemed to get worse, as the political leaders of the time focused more on their own interests ethnic and regions empowerment rather than on fostering a sense of national unity.

In the First Republic, governance was heavily influenced by regional affiliations, with the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions being largely controlled by the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) respectively. These leading parties held almost total power in their areas and often misused public funds and state authority to strengthen their regional dominance instead of working towards a more inclusive national development.[345]

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343 Otusanya (note 286) 330–371.
344 Igiebor (note 285) 493–513.
345 Okunlola (note 291) 183–216.

Political appointments and access to public resources were typically handed out through networks of patronage that favored party loyalty and ethnic ties. Government contracts, job opportunities, and promotions were seldom based on merit; instead, they were used as means to build influence and silence opposition.[346] This kind of governance fostered increased regional distrust and political division, which seriously undermined the delicate democratic institutions that were just beginning to take shape in the country.[347]

Electoral misconduct was common place during this period, as the general elections of 1964 and the Western Region elections in 1965 were both plagued by rampant fraud, including ballot tampering, voter suppression, and intimidation tactics.[348] The 1965 crisis in the Western Region, in particular, sparked significant unrest, earning the nickname "wild wild West", as political violence, arson, and assassinations broke out in the wake of rigged elections.[349] These events made it clear to the Nigerian people that democracy was being undermined by elites who saw political positions as a way to enrich themselves.

The civil service, parastatal and public organizations were not immune to this wave of corruption either. Nepotism, inefficiency, and rent-seeking behaviours became commonplace in public administration, leading to abandoned projects, inflated contracts, and the embezzlement of funds intended for development.[350] This erosion of trust in institutions and the mismanagement of the economy contributed to national instability and a growing belief that civilian leadership was lacking in legitimacy and accountability.

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346 Obamuyi, T. M., & Olayiwola, S. O., (note 292) 80–105.
347 Okunlola (note 291) 189.
348 Ibid.
349 Forrest, T., (note 336), ch 2.
350 Obamuyi & Olayiw.ola (note 292) 91.

This widespread disillusionment paved the way for Nigeria's first military incursion into public governance.[351] On January 15, 1966, a coup led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and a group of young officers toppled the civilian government, citing rampant corruption, electoral fraud, and regional favoritism as their main reasons.[352] While the coup was initially framed as a necessary correction, it inadvertently ushered in a long period of military rule, which came with its own set of challenges, including factionalism and public corruption among the military leaders.[353]

The counter-coup of July 1966, which arose from concerns about ethnic bias in the initial military regime, signaled the end of the First Republic and ushered in a long period of military influence over Nigeria's political landscape. The fall of civilian governance highlighted just how fragile the country's democratic principles were and exposed the deep-rooted corruption that had taken hold in the political arena.[354]

Looking back, the First Republic set the stage for several persistent aspects of political corruption in Nigeria, such as election manipulation, regional favoritism, and the politicization of public service roles. The military claimed their subsequent takeovers were aimed at eradicating these issues; however, the underlying problems that allowed corruption to thrive, like weak oversight, competition among ethnic groups, and a lack of political accountability, remained largely unaddressed.[355]

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351 Okunlola, (note 291) 183–216.
352 Otusanya, (note 286) 330–371.
353 Ibid
354 Igiebor (note 283) 493–513.
355 Forrest (note 284) ch 2.

4.2.3 Military Rule and Systemic Corruption

The long stretch of military rule in Nigeria, lasting from 1966 to 1979 and 1983 to 1999, was marked by deep-rooted and widespread corruption. Even though each military regime often came to power promising to clean up the mess left by the civilian politicians, they quickly turned into the very thing they claimed to fight against. With power concentrated in the executive branch, democratic institutions dismantled, suspension of the nation's Constitution and unrestricted access to national funds, especially from oil, the stage was set for massive theft and systemic failure.

These military governments operated with little to no accountability, as democratic checks and constitutional limits were either put on hold or weakened. This lack of oversight allowed military leaders to rule by decree, sidestepping legislative review and public scrutiny. The centralization of political and economic power in the hands of the Head of State led to rampant financial misconduct, including inflated contracts, misappropriation of public resources, and the use of state funds to buy political loyalty.[356] As noted by Otusanya and Lauwo, this era saw a deliberate weakening of institutional capacity, turning public service into a tool for elite enrichment instead of national progress.[357]

The boom in oil revenues during the 1970s only intensified the scale of corruption. Without strong fiscal accountability measures in place, the windfall from oil was often mismanaged. Development funds were frequently diverted or exaggerated, leading to failed infrastructure projects and lost economic chances.[358] Aloko and Abdullahi argue that Nigeria during this period

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356 Okunlola (note 291) 183, 187.
357 Otusanya (note 286) 330, 337.
358 Igiebor (note 285) 493–513.

became a rentier state, where access to oil wealth was controlled by personal and military connections rather than through established institutional processes.[359]

The regime of General Sani Abacha, which lasted from 1993 to 1998, truly represented the peak of corruption during military rule in Nigeria. Within the short period, Abacha was said to be one of the most corrupt leaders in the country's history, with whopping sum of between $3billion or $5billion fraudulently removed from public treasury and launder overseas.[360] This staggering amount was funneled through a web of fraudulent contracts, shell companies, and offshore accounts.[361] The phrase "Abacha loot" has become synonymous with grand corruption in discussions around the world, and efforts to recover these stolen assets have continued through various administrations and international organizations well into the present day.[362] Igiebor noted that Abacha's actions highlighted the total breakdown of institutions that had been eroded by years of authoritarian rule.[363]

Corruption during this time went beyond just financial theft; it became a fundamental part of the political landscape. The military regime doled out favors in the form of oil licenses, government contracts, and key appointments to secure loyalty from influential figures. In this way, corruption served as a tool for maintaining political power.[364] Any criticism of the regime or calls for democratic reforms were often met with harsh repression, which only normalized impunity and stifled public dissent.[365]

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359 Aloko (note 297) 1, 4.
360 Igiebor (note 285) 493–513.
361 Folarin (note 299) 377–378.
362 Agu (note 289) 1, 8.
363 Igiebor (note 285) 493, 499.
364 Okunola (note 291) 164, 171.
365 Danaan, V. V., Analysing poverty in Nigeria through theoretical lenses, [2018] 11(1) *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 92–94.

By the time Nigeria made the shift to democratic governance in 1999, the effects of years of military misrule were deeply ingrained in the nation: weakened institutions, a widespread culture of unaccountability, limited regulatory oversight, and a political economy largely driven by rent-seeking behavior. As Ojo and his colleagues maintained that, these legacies have lingered into the Fourth Republic, making it all the more challenging to build a transparent and effective system of governance.[366]

In essence, the military era did not merely permit corruption; it institutionalised it as a foundational aspect of governance. Through unrestrained control of state resources, political coercion, and systemic maladministration, military rule in Nigeria entrenched patterns of corruption that continue to influence the country's political and economic trajectory.

4.2.4 The Fourth Republic (1999–Present)

The birth of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999 signified a hopeful return to constitutional democracy after years of military rule. Many believed this shift would usher in a new era characterized by good governance, accountability, and a genuine respect for the rule of law. Yet, instead of breaking free from the deep-rooted corruption of the past, the civilian government has, in many ways, continued, and even intensified, the culture of political corruption at every level.[367]

Ironically, while democratic institutions and civil liberties have been restored, the misuse of political power has only become more entrenched. Corruption has woven itself into the very fabric of our democratic processes. Elections, court systems, and oversight bodies are often manipulated by political figures seeking personal gain. Practices like vote-buying, electoral fraud,

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366 Ojo, L. B. et al., (note 288) 18–20.
367 Ibid.

and biased judicial rulings have become alarmingly common, transforming public office into a means of accessing state resources rather than serving the people.[368]

Oil revenues, which are crucial to Nigeria's economy, have proven to be a double-edged sword. While they help finance the national budget, they also foster a rent-seeking political environment. The distribution of oil proceeds often occurs through unclear fiscal processes, inflated contracts, and politically driven allocations.[369] Obamuyi and Olayiwola point out that this reliance on oil fuels systemic corruption, enabling political elites to strengthen their grip on power and dodge accountability.[370]

Efforts to tackle corruption have been hit or miss, often criticised for lacking impartiality. While the nation's anti-corruption agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) have taken on various cases, their work has sometimes been undermined by political pressure, lengthy prosecution, and insufficient support from institutions.[371] Unfortunately, anti-corruption campaigns have occasionally been used as instruments for political vendettas instead of real reform, which raises questions about their credibility and effectiveness.[372] Nurudeen and Staniewski argued that the absence of consistent political commitment is a major hurdle to achieving meaningful anti-corruption reforms in Nigeria.[373]

Though this current political dispensation may appear to be democratic, it has however, struggled to break free from the corruption legacies of past governments. Instead of eliminating these

368 Otusanya, O. J. and Lauwo, S. G., (note 286) 330, 335.
369 Okunlola, (note 291) 183, 188.
370 Obamuyi (note 292) 82.
371 Adeniran, A. O., Anti-corruption strategies for balanced development: A case study of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), [2019] 5(1) *Advanced Journal of Social Science*, 58–59.
372 Uddin, I. and Rahman, K. U., *Impact of corruption, unemployment and inflation on economic growth evidence from developing countries*, [2023] 57(3) *Quality & Quantity*, 2764.
373 Nurudeen and Staniewski (note 319) 3052, 3061.

issues, the corrupt systems have simply adapted to fit within democratic framework. The ongoing influence of elites, client politics, and a culture of impunity continues to weaken governance, casting doubt on the true nature of Nigeria's democratic journey.

4.3 The Nature of Political Corruption in Nigeria

4.3.1 Institutional Weaknesses

A key reason why political corruption continues to thrive in Nigeria is the inherent weakness of the institutions set up to fight it. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) are at the forefront of this battle. Even though they were created with solid legal foundations and broad powers, these agencies often struggle due to structural flaws, interference from the executive branch, and a lack of true operational independence.

The independence of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies is compromised both by how they are designed legally and how politics plays out in practice. While they have the legal authority to investigate and prosecute misconduct, these bodies rely heavily on the executive for key decisions like leadership appointments, budget approvals, and strategic guidance. This reliance can intervene with its independence and limit the ability to act fairly, especially when the political exposed persons are the subject of such investigations or those connected to the ruling elite.[374] Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga argued that without financial and operational independence, these institutions end up being selective enforcers of justice instead of impartial watchdogs.[375]

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374 Obamuyi (note 292) 80–105.

375 Agu, Nkwo & Eneiga, (note 289) 1, 4.

Political manipulation only adds to this institutional frailty. The EFCC, which was once praised for its proactive approach under strong leadership, has increasingly been accused of being used as a political tool to intimidate opposition figures or shield favoured public officials.[376] This perceived bias undermines the agency's credibility and reduces its effectiveness as a deterrent. Olujobi remarked that the lack of legal protection from executive influence often results in investigations being stalled or dropped based on political convenience.[377]

The challenges that the ICPC and the CCB face highlight some common weaknesses within their institutions. The ICPC has been grappling with a lack of prosecutorial resources and poor collaboration between agencies, which hampers its ability to effectively address systemic corruption. On the other hand, the CCB, which is tasked with overseeing the behavior of public officials, often runs into political pushback when it tries to investigate high-ranking figures.[378] The Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), responsible for handling CCB cases, has also faced criticism for its procedural flaws and vulnerability to political influence, especially in sensitive or high-profile cases.[379]

Additionally, the judiciary, which is supposed to uphold the rule of law, has not been immune to allegations of corruption, bias, and inefficiency. Claims of bribery, inconsistent rulings, lengthy trial processes, and susceptibility to political pressures have significantly eroded public confidence in the judicial system. Otusanya and Lauwo pointed out that both external interference and internal issues, like poor case tracking, lack of accountability among judges, and

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376 Adeniran (note 315) 52, 54.

377 Olujobi, O. J., 'Nigeria's upstream petroleum industry anti-corruption legal framework: the necessity for overhauling and enrichment' [2023] 26(7) *Journal of Money Laundering Control* 1, 6.

378 Augustine, A. A., & Enyi, E. P., 'Control of corruption, trust in government, and voluntary tax compliance in South-West, Nigeria' [2020] 8(1) *Management Studies* 84, 86.

379 Okunlola, (note 291) 183, 185.

opaque appointment processes, are major factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of the judiciary.[380]

These institutional weaknesses foster a culture of impunity, where political figures can engage in corrupt activities with little fear of repercussions. The slow pace of resolving major corruption cases and the ongoing failure to convict high-profile individuals, even when there is strong evidence, send a clear message that anti-corruption laws are either flexible or applied selectively. Folarin argued that this decline in public trust makes anti-corruption initiatives seem largely superficial.[381]

When we stack Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies against international standards, it is clear they are falling short in key areas like autonomy, transparency, and collaboration between agencies. International and regional conventions, such as the *United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC)* and the *African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC),* stress the importance of institutional independence for effective enforcement.[382] Nigeria's ongoing struggle to meet these standards not only undermines its internal governance but also tarnishes its international image, making it less appealing for foreign investors and limiting support from donors.

At its core, the persistent weaknesses in Nigeria's anti-corruption institutions, stemming from political interference, limited independence, and shaky legal oversight, fuel the larger problem of political corruption. For real change to happen, it is crucial to focus on removing politics from anti-corruption efforts, promote judicial independence, and create solid accountability systems both within and outside the government at all levels.

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380 Otusanya (note 286) 330, 335.
381 Folarin (note 299) 377, 379.
382 Igiebor, (note 285) 493, 496.

4.3.2 Socio-Political and Cultural Factors

4.3.2.1 Ethnic Patronage, Godfatherism, and the Normalisation of Corruption

Political corruption in Nigeria cannot just be chalked up to weak institutions; it is deeply intertwined with the socio-political and cultural factors that influence how the country is governed. Over the years, these factors have created a political landscape where corruption is often accepted, justified, and even seen as normal. Key to this situation are cultural trends like ethnic loyalty, the misuse of federal character policies, and established patron-client relationships, all of which have allowed a small elite to maintain control and perpetuate systemic corruption.

Ethnic politics is one of the most significant cultural influences that bolster corruption. With Nigeria's diverse ethnic makeup and federal system, identity politics has become a potent means of accessing and distributing State resources. Politicians often focus on their ethnic groups, rewarding loyal supporters from their ethnic extraction with jobs, contracts, and political favours. This approach undermines merit-based governance and fosters a culture of mediocrity, where public positions are seen not as a duty to serve but as an ethnic privilege.[383]

The constitutional principle of federal character, which was meant to ensure fair representation across Nigeria's various regions, has been widely misused. Instead of fostering inclusivity, political elites have twisted it to justify unqualified appointments and reinforce ethnic patronage. Key institutions, like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the EFCC, and Immigration, Custom etc. are often filled based on ethnic ties and political loyalty rather than

[383] Okunlola, (note 291) 183, 188.

competence.[384] As noted by Otusanya and Lauwo, this manipulation of federal character provisions only serves to perpetuate nepotism and deepen institutional corruption.[385]

Another important socio-political issue we need to consider is the concept of political godfatherism. In this setup, influential individuals with deep pockets act as backers for candidates during elections, often securing their loyalty in return for special access to government resources and positions.[386] Once these so-called anointed "godsons" are in office, they are expected to funnel public funds and contracts back to their sponsors. This relationship seriously undermines democratic accountability and limits the independence of public officials, forcing them to put private interests ahead of the public good.[387]

Folarin pointed out that godfatherism has turned the electoral process into a business, where political hopefuls take on hefty financial burdens during their campaigns, hoping to recoup their investments through corrupt practices once they are elected into public office.[388] This leads to bloated contracts, misuse of public resources, and a host of governance problems. Patronage networks also infiltrate civil service systems, local government operations, and legislative projects, prioritizing loyalty over merit or effective service.[389]

Moreover, politicians often exploit ethno-religious sentiments to dodge accountability. When corruption allegations surface, they tend to frame these claims as attacks on their ethnic or religious backgrounds, rallying communal support for protection. This strategy not only shields the guilty but also deepens divisions and stifles demands for transparency. As a result, public

384 Otusanya (note 286) 330–371.
385 Ibid.
386 Igiebor (note 285) 493–513.
387 Agu (note 289) 1, 5.
388 Folarin (note 299) 377, 385.
389 Ojo (note 288) 55, 58.

discussions become filled with defensive rhetoric instead of constructive criticism, allowing corruption to thrive under the guise of identity politics.[390]

Obamuyi and Olayiwola pointed out how society itself is complicit in maintaining corruption, as local communities sometimes gain from corrupt practices through jobs, contracts, or even just recognition.[391] This creates a resistance to reform, as anti-corruption efforts are seen as threats to the informal benefits and socio-political structures that already exist.[392] Consequently, civic advocacy for integrity and transparency struggles to gain traction in a system that is so deeply intertwined with complicity.

The issue of socio-political and cultural landscape in Nigeria, characterized by ethnic favoritism, the misuse of federal character, godfatherism, and the glorification of ill-gotten wealth, has made corruption a norm rather than an exception. These patterns, combined with institutional dysfunction, have fostered a governance culture where corrupt practices are not only accepted but encouraged. Addressing political corruption in Nigeria requires not just administrative reforms but also a significant cultural shift towards meritocracy, civic responsibility, and ethical leadership.

4.3.3 Legal Deficiencies and disparity of the Justice System

The ability of Nigeria's legal system to effectively tackle political corruption is seriously hindered by structural gaps, procedural inefficiencies, and the uneven application of justice, especially where political exposed persons are involved. These issues not only weaken the impact of anti-corruption laws but also foster a sense of unequal justice, where the powerful

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390 Obamuyi (note 292) 80, 87.
391 Ibid.
392 Ibid.

elites are able to escape liability for their actions, the common citizens are made to face the consequences of their actions, even in minor cases or offenses.

One of the ongoing challenges is the lengthy nature of corruption trials, particularly those involving high-profile figures like former governors, ministers, and lawmakers. Many of these cases drag on for years, often due to procedural tricks, endless adjournments, and poor coordination among prosecutors. A notable example is Orji Uzor Kalu, former Governor of Abia State, who, despite being convicted for diverting public funds, later served as a Senator. Similarly, Joseph Dariye, former Governor of Plateau State, was convicted and sentenced for corruption but had also previously secured a seat in the Senate while undergoing trial.[393] As Folarin pointed out, defendants with the financial and political resources often exploit legal loopholes and strategic delays to prolong proceedings indefinitely.[394] This continuous delay in delivering justice undermines public trust and strengthens the notion that the legal system can be manipulated by the elite.

Another significant flaw is the contentious use of plea bargaining in handling corruption cases. While plea deals are meant to lighten the judicial load and help resolve legal disputes more quickly, in Nigeria, they often end up benefiting politically exposed persons (PEPs) disproportionately. As Olujobi argued that, plea agreements have been used to let elite defendants sidestep serious penalties by opting for financial settlements or minor fines.[395] This practice undermines the principle of equality before the law and further tarnishes the anti-corruption efforts.

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393 Igiebor, G. S. O., *Political Corruption in Nigeria: Implications for Economic Development in the Fourth Republic*, Journal of Developing Societies, vol. 35, no. 4, 2019, pp. 493–513; see also Otusanya, O. J. & Lauwo, S. G., *Corruption and Socio-Political Economic Structures: A Case of Nigeria*, *Journal of Financial Crime,* vol. 26, no. 1, 2019, pp. 330–371.

394 Folarin (note 299) 377, 388.

395 Olujobi (note) 1,10.

The conviction rate for grand corruption among political elites is alarmingly low. Even with high-profile investigations, arrests, and publicised prosecutions, only a few senior officials have faced successful convictions and imprisonment. Adefeso pointed to systemic collusion as a key issue, where prosecutors, law enforcement, and even judges might be pressured or incentivized to sabotage cases.[396] The selective targeting of opposition members while protecting allies of ruling parties further fuels the belief that justice is swayed by political influences rather than being impartial.[397]

On top of that, Nigeria's fight against corruption is hampered by fragmented jurisdictions and poor coordination among institutions. Agencies like the EFCC, ICPC, and the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) often have overlapping responsibilities, which can lead to turf battles, duplicated efforts, and conflicting strategies in prosecution. As noted by Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga, the lack of smooth inter-agency cooperation not only slows down legal proceedings but also muddles judicial outcomes and weakens enforcement.[398]

To make matters worse, there's no reliable witness protection system in place. In cases involving powerful figures, whistleblowers and witnesses frequently face threats to their safety, job loss, and social ostracism. Although the Whistleblower Protection Policy was rolled out in 2016, its implementation has been inconsistent. Many whistleblowers have been reported to be facing retaliation, intimidation, or being fired, highlighting a significant lack of institutional safeguards.[399] This harsh reality discourages public involvement and hampers efforts to bring wrongdoing to light.

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396 Adefeso, H., 'Corruption, political instability and development nexus in Africa: A call for sequential policies reforms' (2018) *Unpublished Manuscript*, 7.

397 Otusanya (note 326) 330–371.

398 Agu, J. C., Nkwo, F. N., & Eneiga, R. U., 'Governance and anti-corruption measures in Nigeria: Strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability and public trust' (2024) 8(1) *International Journal of Economics and Public Policy* 1, 5.

399 Kediehor, Williams, Ohikhena & Robert, (note 332) 1, 4.

The judiciary is grappling with some serious limitations. Even though the Constitution promises autonomy, the independence of judges often gets compromised due to unwarranted political meddling in appointments, disciplinary actions, and administrative choices. Nurudeen and Staniewski pointed out that political figures frequently apply pressure, either openly or behind the scenes, on judicial staff to influence the outcomes of cases that are politically charged.[400] This kind of interference not only undermines the integrity of the judiciary but also fosters a broader atmosphere of impunity.

The way the public perceives selective justice has significant consequences for governance and civic participation. When individuals with long histories of financial wrongdoing are celebrated in political circles or welcmed back into party leadership, while minor offenders face severe penalties, it creates a double standard that undermines the legitimacy of the justice system. Otusanya and Lauwo argued that this kind of disparity breeds societal cynicism, weakens legal compliance, and normalizes corruption.[401]

Consequently, Nigeria's legal framework for combating corruption is hindered by sluggish Court processes, abuses of plea bargaining, inconsistent enforcement, and political manipulation. Real reform needs to focus on bolstering prosecutorial institutions, ensuring judicial independence, fostering effective cooperation between agencies, and establishing strong protections for witnesses and whistleblowers. Without these essential improvements, the quest for justice will continue to be selective and ineffective.

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400 Nurudeen and Staniewski (note 319) 3052, 3060.
401 Otusanya (note 285) 330, 336.

4.3.4 Political Elites and the Entrenchment of Corruption

In Nigeria, the political elite do not just live alongside systemic corruption; they actively nurture and perpetuate it by skillfully manipulating state mechanisms, taking advantage of legal loopholes, and misusing public resources to safeguard their own interests and those of their political allies.[402] Their tight grip on legal immunity, campaign financing, and regulatory bodies highlights just how deeply rooted their influence is in maintaining corruption within the political landscape.

One of the key factors enabling this elite impunity is the immunity clause provision of the nation's Constitution. According to *Section 308 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999*, the President, Vice President, Governors, and their deputies are immune from civil or criminal prosecution during their time in office.[403] While this provision was initially intended to protect executive functions from frivolous legal challenges, it has largely been twisted to allow officials to dodge accountability. Otusanya and Lauwo pointed out that many political office holders exploit this immunity as a legal shield to commit acts of corruption, fully aware that they are safe from prosecution until they vacate the office at the end of the tenure.[404] However, the expectation that these individuals will be held accountable after leaving office is rarely fulfilled. A prime example is Peter Odili, former Governor of Rivers State (1999–2007), who was alleged by the EFCC to have misappropriated over ₦100 billion in state funds. Despite these allegations, he has never been prosecuted, largely due to a controversial perpetual injunction granted by a Federal High Court in 2007, which barred the EFCC from investigating or arresting him.[405] Similarly, several other former governors, such as Danjuma Goje (Gombe State), Abdullahi

402 Agu, Nkwo, & Eneiga, (note 289) 1–15.
403 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) s 308.
404 Otusanya (note 286) 330, 333.
405 Igiebor (note 285) 493–513.

Adamu (Nasarawa State), and Orji Uzor Kalu (Abia State), have faced prolonged, inconclusive legal battles or outright discontinuation of charges, despite credible allegations of financial misconduct.[406] Another danger of allowing them to finish their tenure in office before prosecuting them is that most times, relevant pieces of evidence may have been destroyed or damaged within the period.

Another way that elites solidify corruption is by misusing campaign financing. When there is no clear and enforceable set of rules for political contributions, it opens the door for dirty money to seep into electoral campaigns. Igiebor pointed out that political players often tap into funds from inflated government contracts, embezzled public money, and bribery to support their campaigns.[407] This creates a vicious cycle of corrupt dependency, where elected officials focus on recouping their campaign costs and rewarding their backers through state patronage. As Nurudeen and Staniewski argued, the lack of oversight in Nigeria's electoral process with respect to financing of political parties' campaign has allowed economic interests to overshadow political outcomes, ultimately distorting the essence of democracy.[408]

Beyond financial misconduct, political elites often resort to sabotaging institutions to undermine anti-corruption efforts. This includes meddling with the operations of anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC, ICPC, and the CCB. Appointments in these organizations are frequently swayed by political motives, leading to the installation of loyalists who may not have the independence or determination to tackle corruption cases fairly.[409] Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga noted that many

406 Ibid.
407 Ibid
408 Nurudeen and Staniewski (note 319) 3052, 3062.
409 Obamuyi (note 292) 80, 90.

reform-minded officials in these anti-graft bodies have been sidelined or removed for investigating powerful political figures.[410]

The reach of elites also stretches into the legislative and judicial branches, diminishing their ability to effectively check executive overreach. Through established patronage networks, political elites often compromise the independence of these institutions, ensuring that regulatory and prosecutorial actions are applied selectively. Okunlola emphasized how this collusion among elites enables the unchecked misappropriation of national resources without fear of consequences or exposure.[411]

Legislative abuse by lawmakers is another major factor fueling corruption driven by the elite. Cases of members of parliament getting caught up in budget padding, mishandling funds for constituency projects, and even using their power to demand bribes from government agencies. Ojo and others argued that these actions seriously distort the legislative purpose, as lawmakers seem to prioritize their own interests and political maneuvering over the integrity of the institutions they represent.[412]

On a broader scale, the legitimacy of elite corruption is often bolstered by cultural norms and community dynamics. Many political leaders are seen as guardians of wealth and benefactors within their ethnic or regional groups. In exchange for doling out state resources and favors, they gain admiration, which in turn strengthens prebendal politics and diminishes civic resistance to corruption. Mlambo and others described this situation as "legitimation through corrupt redistribution," where political loyalty is upheld by strategically distributing stolen resources.[413]

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410 Agu, Nkwo and Eneiga (note 289) 1, 7.
411 Okunlola (note 291) 183, 190.
412 Ojo (note 288) 44, 47.
413 Mlambo D. N. et al., (note 325) 39, 41.

Nigeria's political elites play a crucial role in fostering and maintaining corruption by exploiting immunity provisions, manipulating campaign finance, and undermining institutional accountability. Tackling political corruption calls for structural reforms, such as re-evaluating legal immunity clauses, establishing strong campaign finance regulations, and protecting oversight bodies from elite influence. If we do not address the foundational role of the elite class, efforts to combat corruption are unlikely to lead to lasting change.

4.4 Political Corruption and Economic Growth and Development in Nigeria

4.4.1 Misappropriation of Public Resources and Infrastructural Decline

One of the most glaring and harmful effects of political corruption in Nigeria is the rampant misappropriation of public funds, which has seriously hindered the development and upkeep of vital infrastructure. Money that should be going to crucial areas like transportation, education, healthcare, and power is often diverted by political figures, resulting in significant infrastructural gaps that slow down economic growth and deepen social struggles.

Despite various governments pouring considerable resources into infrastructural projects, these efforts frequently fall short due to deeply rooted corrupt practices. Otusanya and Lauwo pointed out that issues like inflating contract costs, creating fake projects, and ignoring procurement rules are widespread among public officials, making it easier for them to embezzle government funds.[414] These dishonest actions often lead to incomplete, abandoned, or poorly executed projects, leaving citizens without essential services and amenities.

In the healthcare section, the theft of allocated funds has left public hospitals severely lacking in resources, with outdated equipment and underpaid staff. Aloko and Abdullahi noted

[414] Otusanya and Lauwo (note 286) 330, 336.

that corruption in procurement has led to poor healthcare delivery, resulting in dire consequences like high maternal and infant mortality rates, prompting the wealthy to seek medical care abroad.[415] The education sector is facing similar issues: funds designated for building schools, providing teaching aids and materials, and training educators are frequently misused, worsening infrastructural decay and lowering the quality and/or standard of education in the country.[416]

Corruption is also a significant issue in both the transport and energy sectors. Even with multiple federal budgets aimed at funding road construction and maintenance, many highways are still in terrible shape, leading to avoidable accidents on the highways resulted in death and loss of properties. Popoola pointed out that this is largely due to corrupt contracting practices, where contractors with political connections get paid without actually delivering on their obligations.[417] The electricity sector, which was privatized to boost efficiency and attract private investment, has also been compromised by corrupt individuals who manipulate regulations and engage in rent-seeking behaviors. As a result, billions of naira have been squandered, with little to no improvement in electricity supply.[418]

These systemic issues have serious economic consequences. Poor infrastructure raises operational costs for businesses, hampers productivity, and discourages both local and foreign investment. Abubakar's work connected these infrastructural shortcomings—primarily driven by corruption—to Nigeria's slow industrial growth and its low standing on global competitiveness rankings.[419] Moreover, the lack of access to essential services exacerbates poverty and inequality, particularly in marginalized and rural areas.

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415 Aloko (note 297) 1, 3.
416 Mlambo D. N. et al., (note 325) 39, 43.
417 Popoola J., 'Globalization and Nigeria's economic development—a study of the interconnectedness' (2020) 10(3) *Open Journal of Political Science* 460, 464.
418 Olujobi (note 377) 1, 5.
419 Abubakar (note 309) 48, 53.

Ajide and Olayiwola argued that corruption disrupts fiscal planning by favouring consumption-driven spending and short-term political gains over sustainable infrastructural development.[420] This creates a resource-dependent economy that is vulnerable to fluctuations in the global oil market. Additionally, the ongoing mismanagement of public funds undermines citizens' trust in government institutions and reinforces the idea of a dysfunctional state.[421]

The link between corruption and the decline of infrastructure highlights a pressing need for reforms in how public finances are managed. There is need therefore to focus on strategies like transparent budgeting, thorough auditing, and getting citizens more involved in overseeing public spending. These steps are crucial to prevent misuse of funds and to make sure that public money is directed towards meaningful development projects. If we do not implement these changes, the deterioration of infrastructure will keep blocking economic progress and distancing citizens from the development goals of Nigeria.

4.4.2 Impact of Corruption on Investment Climate

The investment landscape in Nigeria has seriously been impeded deep-rooted political corruption, which is one of the main reasons for investment decline in the country.[422] This has created a climate of uncertainty that stifles entrepreneurial spirit and drives away both local and foreign investors.[423] With bribery, inconsistent policies, and a lack of transparency, the regulatory environment becomes not just unpredictable but also a financial burden for investors.

Corruption disrupts legal and administrative processes, forcing businesses to pay unofficial fees just to get operational licenses, avoid regulatory checks, or gain an edge in public

420 Ajide and Olayiwola (note 298), 22.
421 Augustine and Enyi (note 378) 84, 88.
422 Igiebor (note 285). 493–513.
423 Obamuyi and Olayiwola (note 292) 80–105.

procurement.[424] These hidden costs slow down efficiency and put law-abiding companies and start-ups at a disadvantage. As highlighted by Otusanya and Lauwo, Nigeria's economy is heavily shaped by rent-seeking behaviors and elite favoritism, where access to lucrative opportunities often hinges on political connections rather than actual skill.[425] This creates a pervasive atmosphere of distrust among potential investors.

Foreign investors tend to be especially wary of entering the Nigeria's market, largely due to the widespread belief in official corruption and weak enforcement of regulations.[426] Their investment choices are influenced not just by the potential for profit but also by governance factors like political stability, rule of law, judicial independence, and the reliability of regulations. According to Obamuyi and Olayiwola, ongoing corruption raises operational costs, undermines legal protections, and diminishes trust in the enforcement of business contracts.[427]

Nigeria's institutional weaknesses have really put a damper on its appeal, especially in sectors beyond oil and gas that thrive on solid policy framework and reliable legal systems. Abubakar pointed out that corruption significantly erodes the institutional strength needed for productive investment and hampers overall capital efficiency.[428] The presence of arbitrary tax laws, sudden cancellations of operational licenses, and unclear bidding processes heightens political risk, making Nigeria less attractive compared to its counterparts in the developing world.[429]

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424 Agu, Nkwo and Eneiga (note 289) 1, 6.
425 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 286) 330, 334.
426 Ibid.
427 Obamuyi and Olayiwola (note 292) 80, 88.
428 Abubakar (note 309) 48, 52.
429 Ndem, B. E., James, H. T. and Agala, F. B., *Autoregressive Distributed Lag Approach (ARDL) to Corruption and Economic Growth Nexus in Nigeria*, J Environ Sci Econ, vol. 1, no. 3, 2022, pp. 8–14.

Global evaluations, like the World Bank's Doing Business reports and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, consistently place Nigeria at the bottom of the list when it comes to ease of doing business and perceived corruption levels. These rankings reflect the worries of investors and lead to lower capital inflows, sluggish industrial growth, and fewer job opportunities.[430]

Domestic investors face their own set of hurdles. They deal with excessive bureaucracy, bias in public procurement, and uneven market conditions. Folarin further pointed out that state-backed companies often get preferential treatment, which skews the market and stifles fair competition.[431] Additionally, the tendency of Nigerian investors to move their capital abroad due to a lack of trust in local governance further weakens the country's investment potential.

The interplay of these factors keeps the cycle of economic stagnation going strong. When investment drops, it leads to a smaller tax base, rising unemployment, and strained public services, all of which create more chances for political elites to engage in rent-seeking behavior. Ajide and Olayiwola emphasised that for Nigeria to achieve sustainable development, it is crucial to implement reforms that enhance institutional transparency, encourage merit-based practices, and establish rule-based governance in investment processes.[432]

4.4.3 The Effect of Corruption on Public Service Delivery and Human Capital Development

The widespread issue of political corruption in Nigeria has seriously undermined the quality and accessibility of public services, which in turn hampers progress in developing human capital. Corruption manifests in various ways, including the misappropriation of public funds, fraudulent hiring practices, inflated contracts, and inefficient administrative processes. Together,

430 Ojeka (note 293) 1, 4.
431 Folarin (note 299) 377–394
432 Ajide and Olayiwola (note 298) 19, 25.

these issues have weakened the ability of state institutions to provide essential social services like healthcare, education, sanitation, and housing. As a result, these shortcomings not only obstruct long-term national development but also jeopardize the well-being of the population.

One particularly area of concern in the nation’s civil service is the corrupt practice that has given rise to “ghost workers”, where nonexistent employees find their names into the payrolls through fraudulent activities of the officials charged with such duties. Nurudeen and Staniewski pointed out that this kind of payroll fraud drains significant amounts from government budgets each year, often due to a mix of poor oversight, inadequate data systems, and the complicity of high-ranking bureaucrats.[433] These schemes usually involve a partnership between corrupt officials and political figures, making it politically tricky and logistically difficult to implement institutional reforms.[434]

In the education sector, the impact of corruption is glaringly obvious, manifesting in crumbling school buildings, a lack of proper learning materials, and teachers who are underpaid. Adefeso points out that although government policies often aim to broaden access to education, the real results fall short due to the systematic misallocation of resources, inflated contracts, and the politicization of leadership roles in education.[435] In many rural areas, schools are left in disrepair, and funds meant for Universal Basic Education (UBE) are frequently misused or misappropriated at local levels, which severely hampers literacy rates and long-term educational success.

Moreover, systemic corruption undermines the effectiveness and morale of public servants. When promotions, appointments, and benefits are handed out based on political connections or bribes instead of merit, it breeds mediocrity and stagnation within institutions.

433 Nurudeen and Staniewski (note 319) 3052, 3060.
434 Otusanya and Lauwo, (note 286) 330–371.
435 Adefeso (note 396) 3.

Mlambo et al. emphasized that these patron-client networks erode professionalism and accountability in administration across various African countries, with Nigeria standing out as a prime example of this dysfunction.[436]

These corrupt practices shake the foundation of public trust. When people see public funds being misused and political elites acting without consequences, it is no wonder their faith in government starts to crumble. Kediehor et al. point out that this growing disillusionment often leads to civic apathy, where folks disengage from participating in governance and might even start to view corrupt practices as just the way things are.[437] This normalization makes it even tougher to push for anti-corruption reforms and undermines democratic accountability.

The long-term effects of corruption on developing human capital are truly alarming. Education and healthcare are crucial for nurturing a skilled, healthy, and competitive workforce. When these vital systems are compromised, the country risks falling deeper into poverty, widening socio-economic gaps, and losing the benefits that come with its youthful population. Ojo et al. argued that corruption not only siphons resources away from public welfare but also exacerbates inequality and marginalization by concentrating wealth and opportunities in the hands of a corrupt few.[438]

Corruption in Nigeria's public sector severely hinders the delivery of essential services and stifles the development of human capital. The manipulation of hiring processes, embezzlement of public funds, and politicization of administrative roles all weaken institutional capacity and societal outcomes. Tackling these challenges needs to be a top priority in policy-making if the nation hopes to achieve sustainable development and inclusive growth.

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436 Mlambo D. N. et al., (note 325) 39, 42.
437 Kediehor C. et al., (note 332) 1, 6.
438 Ojo L. B. et al., (note 288) 1, 10.

4.4.4 Macroeconomic Consequences of Political Corruption in Nigeria

Political corruption has seriously shaken Nigeria's economic stability, leading to a host of ongoing problems like rising national debt, high unemployment rates, persistent inflation, and continuous budget deficits. These economic issues are deeply intertwined with the mishandling and misappropriation of public funds, the widespread practice of clientelism, and fundamental flaws within institutions.

One of the most obvious consequences is the unsustainable rise in public debt. While borrowing can be a valid fiscal approach, in Nigeria, loans often end up funding poorly managed or abandoned projects, or are simply siphoned off for personal gain. High-profile examples include the Ajaokuta Steel Complex in Kogi State and the Aladja Steel Complex in Delta State, both of which have consumed billions in public investment over the decades with little to no productive output, largely due to mismanagement, corruption, and lack of political continuity.[439] According to Otusanya and Lauwo, the country's growing debt is closely tied to irregularities in how contracts are handled, inflated project costs, and the misallocation of funds, leading to debt servicing that squeezes out crucial investments in infrastructure and human development[440].

The unemployment crisis is also worsened by corruption. Hiring processes, especially in the public sector, are frequently marred by nepotism and political favoritism, where jobs are given based on loyalty rather than skill. Mlambo et al. pointed out that this trend undermines the effectiveness of public institutions and prevents qualified individuals from making meaningful contributions to the economy[441]. Moreover, corruption hampers private sector growth by

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439 Eja, K. M., & Ramegowda, M., "Government project failure in developing countries: a review with particular reference to Nigeria," *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, 19 [2020]: 35–47.

440 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 286) 330, 336.

441 Mlambo D. N. et al., (note 325) 39, 43.

imposing informal costs like bribes and protection fees, which stifle small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are essential for job creation.

Inflationary trends in Nigeria are worsened by corrupt economic practices. Uddin and Rahman pointed out that the price instability in Nigeria is not just a result of monetary factors; it is heavily influenced by deep-rooted corruption, which includes rent-seeking behaviours, opaque pricing systems, and widespread fraud in government subsidy programmes.[442] A prime example of this is the fuel subsidy system, which has been historically abused through fraudulent claims and payments to non-existent marketers.[443] This kind of mismanagement not only balloons the fiscal deficit but also leads to a drop in currency value and diminishes consumer purchasing power.

Another crucial area impacted by corruption is budget implementation. Corrupt activities compromise both revenue generation and how funds are allocated. On the revenue side, tax evasion, often facilitated by elite networks, cuts into government income, while inefficiencies in spending arise from the misallocation and embezzlement of funds meant for public services. Okunola et al. highlighted, that corrupt individuals frequently manipulate the budgeting process through project duplication, inflated costs, and kickbacks, making effective fiscal planning and execution nearly impossible.[444] This results in critical sectors being underfunded, projects left unfinished, and growing fiscal imbalances that lead to more borrowing.

Corruption also creates significant hurdles for monetary policy and investor confidence. A system plagued by fiscal leakages undermines trust in government financial management, making it tough for monetary authorities to uphold macroeconomic discipline. Ndem, James, and

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442 Uddin and Rahman (note 372) 2759, 2768.
443 Folarin (note 299) 377–394.
444 Okunola, Umaru and Hassan (note 291) 164, 170.

Agala, using an autoregressive distributed lag model, revealed a strong long-term link between corruption and key macroeconomic indicators, especially inflation and declining gross domestic product (GDP).[445]

In essence, political corruption acts as a major roadblock to economic stability and growth in Nigeria. It skews the way financial resources are distributed, weakens the consistency of policies, and deepens social and economic inequalities. Tackling these broad economic issues calls for not just fiscal and institutional reforms, but also a long-term political dedication to transparency, accountability, and governance based on established rules.

4.4.5 Expanding Socio-economic Inequality and Regional Imbalances

One of the most significant and lasting impacts of political corruption in Nigeria is the widening gap in socio-economic inequality and uneven development across the country's six geopolitical zones. The misuse and politicization of public resources have only deepened these structural disparities, benefiting regions with political influence while leaving others in the lurch. This situation, shaped by ethnopolitical favouritism, nepotism, and the capture of resources by elites, has entrenched poverty, fueled regional resentment, and stifled inclusive national progress.

In reality, corrupt governance has resulted in skewed federal allocations and the selective placement of infrastructural projects that cater to the constituencies of powerful political figures.[446] Instead of aligning public investment with genuine developmental needs, projects are often directed by ethnic loyalty, political convenience, or vote-trading deals. Otusanya and Lauwo pointed out that this trend illustrates a conscious effort by dominant groups to seize public

445 Ndem, James and Agala (note 429) 8, 11.
446 Ojo, Eusebius, Ifeanyi and Aderemi (note 288) 1, 7.

wealth for localised patronage, ultimately undermining fair national development.[447] Infrastructure like highways, universities, and airports tends to be concentrated in politically favoured regions, sidelining States or zones that lack central representation.

The fallout is an uneven distribution of essential social services, such as healthcare, education, clean water, and job opportunities. Mlambo and others argued that corruption in many post-colonial African nations, including Nigeria, perpetuates an urban-elite bias, systematically excluding rural populations and minority groups from the benefits of state spending.[448] The disparities are stark when looking at regional development indicators: access to quality education, maternal health services, and clean water varies dramatically between regions like the South-West and the North-East, highlighting deep-rooted imbalances.

Moreover, the federal character principle, which was meant to ensure fair representation among Nigeria's diverse groups, has been twisted by political players. Instead of promoting inclusivity, this system is frequently manipulated to reward political allies and strengthen elite control. Igiebor noted that these manipulations have eroded public confidence in the fairness of the Nigerian government, fueling ethnic tensions and deepening national divisions.[449]

Youth unemployment adds another layer to regional inequality, with the northern regions, especially the North-East and North-West, facing the most severe challenges. Nurudeen and Staniewski linked part of this issue to corrupt hiring practices that favour those with political connections, leaving out competent but disadvantaged young people.[450] This exclusion not only breeds frustration among the youth but also heightens insecurity, as unemployed individuals in

447 Otusanya and Lauwo (note 286) 330, 335.
448 Mlambo, Mubecua, Mpanza and Mlambo (note 325) 39, 41.
449 Igiebor (note 285) 493, 501.
450 Nurudeen and Staniewski (note 319) 3052, 3057.

marginalized areas become vulnerable to recruitment by insurgent groups and criminal organizations.

In areas that have strong connections with federal authorities, we often see capital projects being completed on time or even fully executed. On the flip side, regions that lean towards opposition or are marginalized tend to face neglect or even abandonment.[451] This kind of disparity creates a deep sense of injustice and fuels feelings of alienation, ultimately undermining the goals of national integration and balanced development.

It is pertinent to note that, the deep-rooted corruption in Nigeria has not only stunted economic growth but has also worsened social divides and regional dissatisfaction. The way public funds are misused for political favors, along with the systemic exclusion of vulnerable areas and groups, has only widened the gap in development. Therefore, addressing political corruption is crucial, not just for better governance, but also for promoting fair development, national unity, and lasting peace.

451 Mlambo, Mubecua, Mpanza and Mlambo (note 325) 39, 41.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study undertook a detailed examination of political corruption in Nigeria, exploring its historical roots, analysing its far-reaching effects on economic performance and national development, and assessing the efficacy of the country's legal and institutional responses. The study found as follows:

1. that corruption in the Nigerian political system is neither incidental nor isolated; rather, it is a pervasive and systemic issue that cuts across governance structures and societal sectors.
2. That the historical trajectory of corruption in Nigeria shows that it has been significantly shaped by colonial administration, successive military regimes, and a prebendal political culture;
3. That the political corruption severely hampers Nigeria's development prospects. It has resulted in the misappropriation of public funds, contributing to the decay of critical infrastructure, underinvestment in education and health, and persistent failures in the electricity sector. It has also undermined investor confidence by fostering regulatory inconsistency and policy unpredictability;
4. that corruption has diminished the efficiency of public services through the prevalence of ghost workers, inflated government contracts, and corrupt procurement processes. On a broader scale, it has aggravated socio-economic inequality and deepened regional

imbalances, as corrupt practices often favour politically influential areas to the detriment of marginalised communities; and,

5. that political corruption in Nigeria is both a driver and a symptom of institutional dysfunction and economic stagnation. Addressing this challenge demands comprehensive reforms that go beyond statutory and administrative measures to include systemic political restructuring, enhanced public oversight, and a reinvigorated civic consciousness.

5.2 Recommendations

Drawing from the findings of this study, effectively tackling political corruption in Nigeria necessitates a holistic strategy that blends institutional strengthening, legal reforms, civic empowerment, and political restructuring. The study profers the following recommendations:

i. that to boost the operational performance of the EFCC and ICPC, it is crucial to guarantee their full autonomy, insulated from political manipulation. These agencies should receive adequate and timely funding, be staffed by highly trained professionals, and be supported by strong legislative frameworks. Their investigative and prosecutorial capacity should be reinforced through access to cutting-edge technology and continuous training, enabling them to detect and prosecute sophisticated financial crimes and recover looted public funds;

ii. a holistic reform in the judiciary is vital for rebuilding trust in Nigeria's anti-corruption system. There is therefore, need to establish a dedicated anti-corruption courts with defined timelines for handling cases to address longstanding procedural delays. Judges appointed to these courts should be selected based on integrity, professionalism, and proven track records, and such judges appointed into the Court may not be elevated to a higher Bench to avoid technical issues;

iii. there should be a clear and define rules with respect to enforcement of transparent and discipline political parties financing and regulation of political campaign funding in order to maintain internal democracy within the political parties;

iv. that the Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal should be equipped with the authority and resources to thoroughly verify the asset declarations of public officials and prosecute cases of false reporting by political elites;

v. to embrace digital governance solutions, such as online procurement platforms, biometric-based payroll systems, and publicly accessible budget tracking tools can significantly improve transparency and reduce the incidence of corruption in government operations; and,

vi. to encourage public reporting of corrupt practices, whistleblower protection laws must be enforced, ensuring the safety and anonymity of individuals who expose wrongdoing. The creation of secure, technology-enabled whistleblowing platforms can facilitate anonymous reporting while safeguarding informants.

5.3 Contributions to Knowledge

The study contributes to knowledge in the following ways:

i. that the electoral body as an institution should not be structured around political individuals but rather should be an independent organ to be able to discharge its duties for the common good of the people and society.

ii. that, the Nigerian Courts be more active in adjudicating on electoral matters so as to be able to rid the nation of electoral and political fraud by dispensing justice in the most appropriate manner.

5.4 Areas for Further Studies

While this study has offered an exploration on political corruption and anti-corruption frameworks in Nigeria, several areas remain underexplored and warrant further scholarly attention. These gaps present opportunities for future research to build upon and deepen the discourse on governance, development, and institutional integrity in Nigeria and comparable contexts. The digital age has introduced new tools for civic engagement and oversight. Social media, mobile applications, open data portals, and whistleblowing platforms now play a central role in exposing corruption and mobilising citizens. Future research can examine the effectiveness, reach, and limitations of these digital mechanisms in driving anti-corruption outcomes, particularly among Nigeria's youth population.

Beyond structural and legal analysis, future studies could delve into the socio-psychological drivers of corruption. This includes exploring societal attitudes toward wealth, public office, and accountability; cultural perceptions of gift-giving and loyalty; and the psychological rationalisation of corrupt behaviour by public officials. Such insights could inform behavioural change campaigns and values reorientation programmes.

5.5 Conclusion

Political corruption remains one of the most persistent and formidable obstacles to Nigeria's socio-economic development, undermining governance, distorting resource allocation, eroding public trust, and weakening democratic institutions. From the colonial legacy of patronage networks to the entrenched corruption of post-independence governance structures, Nigeria's political history has been shaped by a system that rewards impunity and penalises accountability.

The study has demonstrated that corruption is not merely a deviation from administrative norms, but a deeply rooted structural challenge embedded in the political economy of the Nigerian state. Its consequences are wide-ranging, manifesting in economic stagnation, institutional inefficiency, social inequality, and regional marginalisation. Despite the proliferation of legal and institutional frameworks, such as the EFCC, ICPC, Code of Conduct Bureau, and a plethora of anti-corruption statutes, systemic weaknesses and lack of political have continued to hinder meaningful progress.

The research has further shown that combating political corruption requires more than legal instruments; it demands a reconfiguration of political culture, reform of electoral processes, strengthening of judicial independence, and the internal democratisation of political parties. Drawing from comparative examples like Singapore's institutional discipline and South Africa's constitutional activism, the Nigerian case reveals that reform must be multi-layered, combining strong institutions with an active civil society and transparent governance mechanisms.

Ultimately, breaking the cycle of corruption will require genuine and sustained political will at all levels of government. It will require institutions that are not only independent but also empowered and adequately resourced to carry out their mandates. More importantly, it will require the engagement of citizens, through advocacy, participation, and accountability-driven demand for good governance. Only then can Nigeria redirect its trajectory toward inclusive economic growth, democratic consolidation, and sustainable national development.

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