

## **Governance, Corruption, and Public Service in Nigeria**

**Emmanuel Ikechi Onah, PhD<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science, University of Lagos, Nigeria, [eonah@unilag.edu.ng](mailto:eonah@unilag.edu.ng)

### **Abstract**

This paper essentially interrogates the role of corruption in the governance crisis currently plaguing Nigeria and which has led to a near collapse of public service in the country. The paper argues that the persistence of corruption in government in Nigeria is in large part traceable to public officials as they respond to the pressures on them in the course of rendering public service, which makes them dip their hands into the public coffers and divert public resources meant for the provision of public goods and services into their private pockets. The work is guided by the political economy theoretical framework, which explains that there is an inevitable vicious cycle of relationships between corruption and governance that produces the failure of public service as outcome. Using the qualitative research method based on the historical-institutional analysis of data obtained from documentary sources, which helps trace public service corruption through the different governmental regimes in Nigeria. This paper finds that there is a cyclical relationship between governance, corruption and public service in Nigeria whereby each variable affects and is affected by the other variables. Corruption undermines governance and public service efficiency in the country. The work recommends the enhancement of good governance outcomes in the country and the reduction of incentives for corruption among public officials, while cases of corruption will be severely punished and the proceeds of corruption recovered.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Governance, Service Delivery, Public Service & Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

This paper is a study of corruption among public servants in Nigeria, and how it continues to create a governance crisis that manifests in persistent public service delivery failures and other developmental problems in the country. The interplay between corruption, governance and public service in Nigeria has been a major bane of development in the country. Over the years, corruption has cost Nigeria dearly. In the first 60 years of independence, corruption cost the Nigerian economy more than 550 billion dollars World Justice Project surveys on corruption (as cited in Hoffmann, 2025), and at the present rate, it is estimated that it could cost the country up to 37 percent of its Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in wastages by 2030 (PwC, 2021). Only recently, a report by the country's Auditor-General revealed that nearly 117 million dollars was lost in government contract fraud and procurement violations in 2020 alone (Hoffmann, 2025).

Corruption has been defined as the “misuse of public powers for private gain” (World Bank, 1997: 3). Transparency International (2023) defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It has also been defined as the deriving of selfish advantage for oneself and related individuals and groups from official relationships and behavior (Tanzi, 1995). In this work, the term, corruption is used to refer to that abuse of office which is carried out by public servants or officials in government as they render their services to the public. In this regard, it is the misuse of the powers and opportunities

of public office for private gain. It is the abuse of authority, the misuse of access to opportunities provided by that authority, for personal or own group interest or gain (Williams, 1999). Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits for or extorts a bribe; when the official is involved in embezzlement, misappropriation and looting of public funds; when the official participates in fraud and manipulation of procedures; and, when the official promotes nepotism and favoritism in official conduct, among others.

Corruption takes place when bribes are offered to circumvent public policies and processes for selfish advantage and profit. It equally takes place through patronage and the diversion of public funds for private ends (Williams, 1999). This paper argues that corruption is intertwined with governance. It is in the course of rendering service to the public that officials engage in corruption. Corruption is thus a part of the cost of governance, that part of the cost of governance that is reported in official books but does not go into actual governance as it is diverted to the pockets of public officials. Corruption is a leakage from the total cost of governance, a drain to the national coffers. This interplay between corruption and governance has further led to the collapse of public service in Nigeria. Public officials now hardly provide any real services to the public but only give a semblance of trying to provide such services, as a way of diverting the resources meant for the services into their private pockets. Public servants are now only in government for what they can get out of office.

This work is an effort to interrogate the relationship between governance, corruption and public service in Nigeria. Public service in Nigeria has for long been characterized by monumental corruption and collapse of ethics, low accountability and transparency, failure of public service delivery and lack of public trust in the government. Public service here is used to refer to all the services provided by officials (public servants) who occupy the structures and institutions of government, including the civil service (government ministries and departments, agencies and parastatals), the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Governance on the other hand, is the exercise of authority, direction and control of an organization to ensure that its goals are achieved (Fourie and Jordan, 2017). The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2009 as cited in Emeh, Ugwuibe and Olise, 2019) defines governance as the process by which decisions are made and implemented (or not implemented).

When decisions are well made and executed efficiently, we talk about good governance, whereas poor decision-making and execution leads to bad or poor governance. Good governance is characterized by participation, consensus, rule of law, transparency and accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and inclusiveness in policy-making and implementation (World Bank, 1994). Governance, corruption and public service outcomes in Nigeria have over the years been mutually reinforcing, such

that consistent poor governance has undermined accountability mechanisms and created loopholes for corruption, which depletes public resources and further reinforces poor governance, ultimately resulting in the failure of public service delivery in the country. It is this vicious cycle in the relationship of the three variables that this paper seeks to study.

The study poses a number of questions, namely, what is the relationship between governance, corruption and public service delivery in Nigeria? How does corruption undermine governance in Nigeria and how does governance itself impact corruption? How does governance affect public service delivery efficiency in the country? What is the impact of corruption on service delivery in Nigeria? This study is very pertinent at this time, considering the problems faced by African countries, on account of governance challenges and corruption (Wrong, 2009, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 1999). This study is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where rampant corruption is fast eroding governance quality and undermining institutions that are critical for development (Agbiboa, 2012). Many Nigerians agree that corruption is the major challenge facing governance and development in the country (NOIPolls, 2024), and several authors have pointed to the dangers posed by governance failures to Africa's development (Hyden, 2006; Onah, 2010). This study will contribute to the understanding of the governance crisis in Nigeria as well as the impact of corruption on public service in the country.

## **Methodology**

This work adopts the qualitative descriptive method. This design is suitable as there are many writings on the topic of corruption, governance and public service delivery. Much of the available writings are reports of primary data obtained from surveys, interviews and observations by researchers who have put them down for public use. Secondary sources are used throughout this work for the needed data. The use of secondary data is justified as much of the data in the area of the topic are relevant and reliable. Specifically, data for this work was obtained from books, journals, reports of government agencies, local and international organizations, and newspapers. The data was gathered from multiple sources and over a long period of time, and the contents cross-matched against each other, which helped to control for bias. Data analysis utilized the historical institutional analysis method, based on the various governmental regimes in the country's history.

## **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

This study makes use of the radical political economy theory as framework of analysis. The method of political economy ensures investigation of any given social phenomenon in the process of its emergence and development. It considers this process as an objective reality, and reveals the internal contradictions of development inherent in the given social phenomenon (Nikitin, 1983). The approach sees the subject matter as a totality,

composed of different aspects which influence and are in turn influenced by each other. Thus, to arrive at conclusions about the whole phenomenon, the different parts of the phenomenon have to be concretely studied; and to arrive at conclusions about the various parts, the whole phenomenon has also to be understood. In the present study, the political economy method will enable us see governance outcomes and levels of corruption as manifestations of the peculiar economic organization of the country, which of course determines the operation of the various segments of the larger society, including public service.

The economic organization of the country is part of the legacies of capitalism bequeathed to their Nigerian colony by British officials. Part of this legacy was that at independence, the colonial masters handed over power to a pliant indigenous comprador bourgeoisie, whose members then proceeded to take control of the facets of society, including the commanding heights of the Nigerian economy. Since then, governance institutions in the country, including government itself, have served the interests of the Nigerian ruling class (Onimade, 1985). The Nigerian ruling class however remains an agent of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, and the Nigerian economy itself has remained a dependent and peripheral part of international capitalism. Those who control government have not cared about development and governance effectiveness but rather, have used their access to the national coffers for capital accumulation. This is the origins of corruption in public service in Nigeria, whereby public office becomes the avenue to accumulate resources into private pockets.

Corruption and the governance problems it produces are not therefore, accidental but rather structural, rooted in the political and economic contradictions of dependent capitalism in states like Nigeria. The structure of these states ensures that governance institutions do not serve the broad people, but the narrow elite members of the ruling class. The narrow-base of this class necessitates that members will maintain a patronage system to connect them to the people, but even this however is ultimately restrictive and antithetical to public accountability. The nature of the economic system is at the roots of the problem of corruption in public service in Nigeria, as this dominant so-called liberal political economic system in the country does not have much provision for those who cannot find their feet in the competitive market. Soon therefore, those who have not must gather themselves around those who have, in clientelist networks of corruption, whereby public servants perceive their office as right of access to the public coffers, from where they divert the resources some of which they redistribute to their network members of political associates and ethnic and religious kin.

This reality of the economic system has made politics in the country to amount to networks of prebendalism (Joseph, 1987). Under the situation, public office is regarded as the opportunity for office holders to generate material benefits for themselves and their supporters and kin groups. This means that people often coalesce around public servants

whom they support during elections after which they start benefitting from the public servant while he is in office. Politics thus gives the opportunity for the public servant to win and occupy office which enables him to have access to the public coffers, to satisfy his needs and those of his supporters. Support to public servants also becomes an opportunity for supporters to rip-off the economy and make quick gains for purely selfish purposes. This type of corruption is a ready tool for capital accumulation, and gives public servants the funds for the bribery of officials to circumvent official processes while in office as well funds to find their way during future elections.

A government that comes in through corruption cannot be anything but corrupt in office, just as a corrupt regime cannot provide good governance in the country. This is because when the government dissipates public resources through corruption, it cannot thereafter provide any significant dividends and benefits to the people, and can only possibly seek to survive by more corruption. This was the case with the military regimes which ruled this country for much of its history, as they were not very concerned with the welfare of the people but were spending huge resources to buy the people's acquiescence by corrupt means. Because of the very corrupt nature of military rule, the regimes rather encouraged corruption in the country instead of curbing it. This got to a head during the Babangida and Abacha days when corruption became a conscious tool in the hands of the military heads of state for regime stability. Unfortunately, this has continued well into democratic rule in the country.

### **Background to the Crisis of Corruption in Nigeria**

The history of corruption in government in Nigeria can be traced to immediately after independence, when the new indigenous rulers quickly embarked on a brazen diversion of the common patrimony in a rapacious quest for capital accumulation. Contracts were awarded on the condition of kick-backs of "10%" of the contract sums to government officials (Onah and Okeke, 2017). Government officials were in the habit of accepting bribes before doing their duties, as well as accepting rewards for services done. Even the leading politicians of the First Republic were known to constantly dip their hands into public coffers to settle private matters, such as shown in the Report of the Sutton Panel which found that most of the paid-up capital of the African Continental Bank (ACB), a bank that was owned by the Azikiwe family, was from the Eastern Regional Financial Corporation (Enyia, 2019). Azikiwe was premier of the Eastern Region at the time.

When the First Republic was overthrown, largely on account of the corruption of the politicians, military rule took off expectedly on a high note of anti-corruption (Onah, 2010). However, military rule not only accentuated the problem, but led to a phenomenal expansion in official corruption in Nigeria and the nation's public services eventually became bedeviled by widespread corruption. Initially, the military actually made a show of fighting corruption with statements purporting to condemn the act and warn of serious

repercussions for offenders. But notwithstanding such statements in the early part of military rule in the country, it was not long after that military officials were seen to have become part of the rot. This situation could be explained by a number of facts.

First, the military came into government with very little experience of governance. They therefore surrounded themselves with civilians from the previous regime, many of whose advice were obviously not above board. This was how the phenomenon of the “super-permanent secretaries” emerged, referring to a group of young civilian public service technocrats who were the advisers of the military in the early years of military rule through the years of the civil war. Next, was the pressure of the civil war that came shortly after the military took office. The exigencies of the period would have meant that many war contracts were awarded which did not follow the due process. Victory in the war would have given the military a lot of confidence to continue most of the corrupt war practices afterwards. Finally, the confidence of post-war power gave many officers and men, and their associates the audacity to take illegal advantage of military rule to engage in corruption, such as helping to clear goods from the seaports without paying the requisite duties, helping to cross goods illegally through checkpoints, offering protection duties to well-placed individuals, etc.

Before long, as new men of wealth started emerging from amongst military personnel and others associated with military rule, noticeable changes occurred in the public perception of corruption in the country which first became ambivalent and then enthusiastic. Military rule started to entrench the culture of public corruption established by the earlier civilian regime. Then gradually, the military began to actively promote the cankerworm, even attempting to use its monopoly of force to prevent Nigerians from complaining about it at all (NACCIMA, 1999). This situation was hardly surprising. The actors in both the civilian and military regimes were factions of the same comprador capitalist class whose interest was never the development of the national economy but actually the use of access to power for primitive accumulation. This was even more so among the military because of that institution being farther removed from the rest of society by the nature of its colonial origins and structure.

The military had no roots whatsoever in the economy and so could not act to promote it. Their attitude to economic and societal development was thus mercenary which only worked to engender corruption. It was then no wonder that in later years of military rule, corruption progressively developed to outright looting of national resources in an unholy race to promote selfish interests and ambitions. This promotion of official corruption spanned virtually every military regime which ruled the country, save for brief periods when corrective regimes were in place (Maduagwu, 1996). The Gowon regime was enmeshed in corruption. By the tail end of that regime, reports were rife of unaccountable massive wealth of Gowon's military governors and other public office holders in the regime. The situation came to a head when General Gowon attempted to prevent the

swearing of affidavits containing accusations of corruption against leading members of his regime, after such affidavits had been sworn to against J.S. Tarka and Mr. Gomwalk, both of whom were officials of his regime.

The regime of Murtala Muhammed which overthrew Gowon immediately set out to probe erstwhile officers of the previous regime, and the findings of those probes led to purges which not only affected the governors and other officials of that government, but also spread to the judiciary, the police, the civil service, and the parastatals (Maduagwu, 1996). When General Mohammed died in an abortive coup against his regime, it was left to General Obasanjo who took over the reins of government to continue with the sanitization exercise in the public service. It was apparent though that the earlier zeal with which government pursued the matter under Mohammed was lacking during the Obasanjo era. The election conducted under Obasanjo to usher in a civilian regime ended with the 12-2/3 controversy that pointed to some level of corrupt practices. The new civilian regime under Shehu Shagari was in place between 1979 and 1983, but unfortunately continued in the corrupt practices of earlier regimes. When the army came back to government by toppling the Shagari regime, it was no wonder that it was under the pretext of fighting corruption.

General Mohammadu Buhari who was at the head of the new military regime that took over at the end of 1983, claimed that his regime was on a mission to wipe out corruption and indiscipline from public life in Nigeria. The regime launched the 'War against Indiscipline' (WAI) by which they hoped to fight indiscipline and restore sanity to the Nigerian society. Buhari also clamped numerous politicians and public officials suspected of corrupt practices into detention and set up numerous tribunals both at the Federal and State levels to probe them. Many were found guilty on several counts and were jailed for hundreds of years in addition to forfeiture of some assets and refund of ill-gotten sums of money (Maduagwu, 1996). Although General Buhari claimed that his regime was fighting corruption, there was public discontent at the time especially over the manner in which the regime pursued those objectives which many considered inhumane.

### **Corruption and the Collapse of Public Service in the Abacha and Babangida Years**

General Buhari was eventually toppled by General Ibrahim Babangida who immediately proceeded to undermine whatever claims of anti-corruption efforts by the Buhari regime. For the eight years he was in power in the country, Babangida avoided any rhetoric about corruption and in many instances actively encouraged corruption. For instance, ostensibly in order to buy popularity, he discharged, acquitted or reduced the sentences of all the politicians who had been detained or jailed by Buhari and released them. By 1991, Babangida also reversed the decision of General Mohammed and promulgated a Decree which not only restored the ranks of the dismissed erstwhile military governors under

Gowon, but also returned their seized assets (Maduagwu, 1996). By pardoning corrupt officials convicted by his predecessors and returning their seized properties, the regime was perceived to be officially sanctioning corruption in the country.

Babangida similarly took many measures to encourage corruption. In a bid to distribute largesse to his cronies and 'give jobs to the boys', the country witnessed a proliferation of institutionalized public agencies and ad hoc task forces, during the Babangida years, with the accompanying high turnover of public office holders. Whenever there were complaints or public outcries over corruption among his public officials, Babangida's standard response was to dismiss such allegations with a wave of the hand or he would either re-deploy the affected officials or retire them without any reasons (Gboyega, 1996). In this environment of public administration under Babangida, corruption became pervasive. The level of corruption reached a stage where even in government-to-government interaction one had to bribe his way (Gboyega, 1996).

Military governors and other appointees of the regime had a field day in converting state resources into personal wealth in a deliberate design that used corruption as an instrument of regime stability. In 1991, the government was accused of diverting the Gulf war oil price windfall of about 12.4 billion dollars into private coffers. Under the circumstances, accountability and transparency among public servants became foreclosed. Indeed, government actively created 'legal and legitimate loopholes' that were exploited by public officers to make money and ensure their comfort and that of their families after public office, in the thinking that "it really makes no sense for a top public officer to retire into a life of want or 'socio-economic oblivion', especially when it is recognized that the same officer would have during his tenure made a good number of contractors (into) millionaires..." (Agedah, 1993: 26).

In fact, corruption ultimately became something of a state policy under the Babangida regime, and he was noted to reward cronies with several dirty deals such as money laundering and drug deals (). Towards the end of the Babangida regime, contracts were being openly awarded to cronies without public tender and at inflated costs, the excess of which were routinely paid into the accounts of these officials. These contracts were regularly abandoned by the contractors who were often assured of protection by government officials. In many other instances, these officers simply incorporated companies where their wives and children were directors and proceeded to award multi-million naira contracts to them, many of which were never executed after full payments had been made.

By the time General Abacha came on the scene, any modicum of sanity left in our public service finally vanished. Abacha and his family simply withdrew huge sums from the Central Bank of Nigeria as if it were their private bank. In the end, Abacha was reputed to have looted over \$5 billion from the coffers of the country (Pallister, 2000). High and

low government officials also seized public assets and converted public funds into private wealth without even attempting to camouflage their behaviors behind rules and procedures. Outright confiscation of public assets became the order of the day as inelegant and simplistic schemes were devised to divert public wealth (Williams, 1999). Perhaps in an attempt to perpetuate his stay in office, Abacha even attempted a self-succession scheme in which all the five government-registered political parties were going to present him as the sole presidential candidate in the transition election his regime was organizing (Omitola, 2003), until he suddenly died in 1998.

### **Democratic Rule and Corruption in Public Service in the 4th Republic**

Corruption among public officials was a major reason why people got fed up with military rule. After the Babangida regime annulled the Presidential election held on June 12<sup>th</sup> 1993, the demand for the military to leave the political scene grew loud. This got even louder when Abacha came on board. Eventually, on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999, a new civilian regime under took office and the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic was born. As expected, anti-corruption was high on the agenda of the new government, led by President Obasanjo. The president saw that corruption in public service had become a cankerworm eating the country dry and set out to tackle it. He therefore embarked on a number of anti-corruption measures, including the setting up of anti-corruption panels, introduction of a Code of Ethics for Federal Ministers and Special Advisers; and a new Anti-Corruption law which provided for the establishment of an Anti- Corruption Commission with powers to arrest and prosecute suspects.

The Code of Conduct for Ministers and Special Advisers of the Federal Government of Nigeria' subscribed the officers to the seven principles of public life, namely: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and, leadership. To assist the officers in upholding these principles, a specific Code of Conduct was adopted by them. Among other provisions, they agreed under the heading, accountability and transparency, that "we have an overriding responsibility to the public interest which requires that we put to one side all personal, sectoral and regional interests. We are accountable for our decisions and actions to the public and are prepared to be open to scrutiny by the public. To facilitate and inform this process, we shall to the extent possible be open and transparent in the discharge of our public duties and encourage those for whom we are responsible".

They further agreed that "we shall not exercise our official power or our official duties or function in the execution of our office and at the same time know that in the performance of the duties or function or in the exercise of the power, there is the opportunity to further our private interest or those of our friends and relatives over and above the benefit this gives to the wider community". They also agreed that "we shall not act, after we leave public office, in such a manner as to take improper advantage of our previous office"

(NACCIMA, 1999). The Anti-corruption Act, passed by the National Assembly led to the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The law provided for the following offences among others: giving or accepting of gratification either directly or through an agent, counseling offences related to corruption, fraudulent acquisition or receipt of property, deliberate frustration of investigation by the independent anti-corruption commissions and making of false statement of returns, bribery of public officers, using office or position for gratification, failure to report bribery transactions, and dealing with property acquired through gratification (Maduabum, 2006). From the foregoing, it was expected that corruption in public service will be given the attention it deserved. For a moment, especially due to the frenzy of propaganda as part of the touted fight against corruption in public service, it seemed as if the phenomenon was in retreat. A number of public servants were at different times even kicked out of office on charges of corruption, including former ministers Hussaini Akwanga and Fabian Osuji, and former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun (The New Humanitarian, 2003; Ribadu, 2013).

Before long however, it started dawning on Nigerians that the reality of corruption was far different from propaganda. It soon became clear that corruption in governance was not being successfully tackled in the country. Corrupt practices continued to abound not only among civil servants, but also in the other segments of public life, including the various executive organs, the legislatures and the judiciary in the country. According to Igiebor (2019), systemic weaknesses have persisted in the Fourth Republic that allow political office to continue to function as vehicle for personal enrichment rather than public service while governance practices continue to allow office-holders to distribute resources to loyalists in return for political support instead of using such resources for national development. Not long into the Obasanjo civilian regime, and almost immediately after the regime's anti-corruption laws came into practice, a federal permanent secretary was arrested and detained after it was discovered that he had connived with other public officers to embezzle huge sums of public money.

In fact, various corruption scandals broke out under Olusegun Obasanjo's presidency, including the Transcorp shares scandal where the president cornered some shares for himself thereby violating his own code of conduct standards for public officers. This was similar to the presidential library scandal on the eve of his exit from power where donations amounting to huge sums of money were pressured out of loyalist public officials. Ultimately, the manner of elections conducted by the Obasanjo civilian regime became the clearest indication that the regime itself was not serious about its touted anti-corruption stance, as the 2003 and the 2007 general elections became the worst ever in the country. And as if these were not yet enough, General Obasanjo, towards the end of his reign, engaged in a failed campaign for tenure elongation that was notorious for the

massive corruption that was involved (Vanguard News, 2011). Even after Obasanjo left office, it was found that massive corruption had been perpetrated by his regime in the energy sector where about \$16 billion was spent trying to solve the country's energy crisis at the time without any tangible result (Osummuyiwa, Biermann, and Kalfagianni, 2018).

When Obasanjo finally left office, President Yar'Adua took over. But he died in office shortly after. His Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan eventually took over. President Jonathan however was soft on corruption. In fact, he was often accused of using corruption in government as a tool to settle his friends and associates. The Jonathan regime was thus a period when corruption in public service had a field day. There were several allegations and scandals during the regime, including the allegation that about \$20 billion oil revenues was not remitted to the federation account (Cocks and Brock, 2015), and several other scandals involving the Petroleum Ministry. In the later period of the Jonathan administration, a scandal broke out involving the Central Bank in cash tripping of mutilated notes, which allowed low-level workers in the apex bank to directly steal N8 billion in a four-day period (Africa Oil and Gas Report, 2015).

There was also the allegation that \$11.6 billion was missing from Nigeria LNG Company dividend payments, and another that 60 million barrels of oil valued at \$13.7 billion was stolen under the watch of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) from 2009 to 2012 (Izeze, 2015). Before the end of the Jonathan regime, a new scheme had become rampant, whereby the Nigerian government was regularly led by her officials into signing turnaround or maintenance contracts with fake foreign companies, with provisions inserted in the contract agreements for huge damages to be paid to a party to the agreement if the contract was revoked by the other party. Sooner or later after the contract-signing, the government will accuse the foreign company of non-performance and then unilaterally revoke the contract. Immediately, the foreign company will approach a foreign court, asking for damages on the basis of the revocation of the contract.

It was in this way that Nigeria was fleeced of large amounts of money ostensibly paid to wronged foreign companies. In one such case, a company, Process and Industrial Developments Ltd (P&ID), took Nigeria to a British court asking for \$20 billion for wrongful termination of contract. This was after Nigerian government officials and the P&ID officials, on arbitration, had agreed to a settlement in the sum of \$850 million for P&ID. When the Nigerian government defaulted, a British court placed an injunction on Nigeria with a cost of nearly 12 million pounds, and eventually awarded a final judgment of \$10 billion against Nigeria. Before these judgments could be fully executed however, the Jonathan regime lost the 2015 elections. The new Buhari government decided not to honour the judgment. The subsequent appeal by P&ID to the British Appeal Court was won by the Nigerian government and the appeal courts set aside the previous judgments

(Ikpeze and Wosu, 2023). The appeal case however, opened a can of worms - it was revealed that the company at the centre of the contract was non-existent, and that the whole issue was a scam that involved mostly Nigerians on both sides of the matter, including the government lawyer, who turned out to be involved with the fake company he was supposed to be prosecuting.

These and many other issues of corruption dogged the Jonathan regime throughout its tenure. Corruption was therefore understandably top on the list of issues that featured in the campaigns for the 2015 elections. When President Jonathan lost that election to Mohammadu Buhari, there was a lot of hope that the anti-corruption fight will get a boost in the new regime. But the anti- corruption fight under Buhari was a big failure. In fact, it was public servants under the Buhari regime that scuttled their own fight. In 2016, only a few months into office, the Senate ad-hoc committee on the humanitarian crisis in the North East, following the Boko Haram insurgency, indicted the then Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Mr Babachir Lawal in a N200 million contract scandal for the clearing of weeds in Yobe State by a company he owned (Adebayo and Ojo, 2017). Lawal was appointed by Muhammadu Buhari. The moral dilemma created by the situation notwithstanding, it was only in October 2017 after a three-man panel led by Vice-President, Yemi Osinbajo investigated and found him culpable that President Buhari eventually sacked Lawal (Abayomi, 2017).

An even more embarrassing case of corruption under Buhari was that of Abdulrasheed Maina. The case actually started under the Jonathan regime. Maina was the head of the task force on pension reforms during the Jonathan administration and was alleged to have embezzled billions of naira in pension savings. He was fired from his position by the Jonathan administration and put under investigation for corrupt practices. He fled Nigeria in 2015. Interpol then issued an arrest warrant against him. But after Buhari took over government, he managed to return to Nigeria and not only enjoyed protection from the Buhari government but was reinstated and given a double promotion in the public service by the government (Abdulaziz and Busari, 2017). Eventually though, Maina was convicted after he was found guilty of money laundering (Abayomi, 2017). Today, two years after President Tinubu has been in office the feeling remains that corruption in public service is as alive as ever.

### **Interplay of Corruption, Governance, and Public Service in Nigeria: An Analysis**

There is a nexus between governance, corruption, and public service in Nigeria. according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2014), governance is the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels, comprising the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Inherent in the above definition is the meaning

that governance involves policy decision-making as well as the implementation of policy decisions. Inherent also in the foregoing is that governance involves outcomes- positive, and negative. It follows then that when policies are made in the correct manner- good policies, and well implemented, there is likely to be a good governance outcome. Of course, the opposite will result in poor governance outcomes.

Poor governance creates loopholes for corruption, enabling public resources to be diverted into private hands. As pointed out earlier, corruption is part of the cost of governance. In this regard, it is the cost of governance that would have been used in the execution of projects and provision of services but which is diverted into private pockets. This can be explained with the several leakages from Nigeria's oil revenues over the years, for example, between 2010 and 2015, when about 20 billion dollars was allegedly not remitted into the federation account by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC; 2.2 billion was alleged to have been illegally withdrawn from the Excess Crude Accounts; and, 11.6 billion dollars was alleged to be missing from the accounts of Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Company accounts, among others (Izeze, 2015). These were monies that could have been utilized to provide public goods and services, but which ended up in private pockets.

It is in this manner that corruption reduces from governance outcomes. In other words, the actual relationship between corruption and governance is not just linear, but is also cyclical. Corruption produces poor governance, and poor governance leads to corruption. Once corruption interplays with governance, it will certainly lead to the failure of public service. Public service fails when public servants cannot deliver their promises to the people; when the dividends of governance- in the health sector, education sector, infrastructure and social services, among others, cannot be provided because these officials have already diverted the resources meant for their provision into their private pockets. The failure of public service in turn reinforces poor governance and more corruption in government. It is thus a vicious cycle.

The country has witnessed this cycle almost throughout its history and it has spanned virtually all administrations in the country, negatively affecting all facets of government and development. As pointed out by Anderson and Tverdova (2003), the misuse of power by public officials for personal gain usually make citizens to lose faith in the capability of government to deliver good governance. In Nigeria, this has reduced trust in government and confidence in elected officials among the people (TI, 2023). Corruption in public service can diminish foreign direct investment (FDI) as foreign investors become reluctant to commit to an uncertain business environment (Urien, 2024), further diminishing economic growth and development. Corruption in public service ensures that public service to the people is neglected. Poverty and inequality may widen and economic growth dips.

## **Recommendation and Conclusion**

It is generally agreed that no society can achieve its full potential if it allows corruption to remain full-blown as it has become in Nigeria. Corruption distorts and retrogresses development. The present clientele nature of our economy does not make for national development as its ‘cash and carry’ nature engenders corruption. Before corruption could be eliminated among public servants therefore, our economy must be reorganized in such a way as to make it serve the national interest. There must be transparent governance and public accountability. All cases of official corruption and abuse of office must be severely punished and all monies looted including those kept in foreign accounts must be recovered. There should be the strengthening of civil service rules and financial instructions to regulate the activities of all public servants. Merit must be emphasized in recruitments, appointments and election into public service.

In addition, the morale and commitment of public servants must be enhanced through improved conditions of service that could discourage the tendency towards corruption among public servants. Accountability and transparency should also be enhanced in the county’s public service by reducing the pressures which the larger society brings to bear on public officials while in office. A large percentage of Nigerians are poor and many of these poor Nigerians are dependent on public officials for sustenance, a fact which often drives these officials to seek to personalize public assets to meet demands. Measures must be taken to alleviate the poverty of the vast majority of Nigerians, including the establishment of a comprehensive social welfare package to cater for the unemployed, the sick, the elderly and destitute. Efforts must also be intensified to improve infrastructural facilities like electricity, roads, water, and telecommunications.

To achieve all these, government must be run on a master-plan whereby the needs of the people over a long period are identified and graduated for faithful provision over time. This way, resources are mapped out to provide resources and are not allowed to lie idle but immediately deployed to projects and services as they become necessary so that they do not go into private pockets. There must be a re-orientation of societal values that will make citizens take a stand against corruption in public service. There must also be institutionalized provisions for the punishment of corrupt offences. Those who are caught in corruption must be barred from rendering such public services again all the gains they made through corruption will be taken from them. Effort must be made always to avoid the situation according to Williams (1999), “where stolen assets are recovered from a thief without punishing the thief, as this would encourage others to continue along the same line by devising new methods for ensuring that what they steal in the future could neither be recovered nor will he be punished.”

## **Conclusion**

It has been seen in this paper how corruption has virtually destroyed the rendering of public service in Nigeria. Public service in Nigeria is now tied to corruption such that public servants only now offer their services for personal gains. This situation is aided by the character of the government as virtually all governments in Nigeria have been agents of the peripheral and dependent Nigerian State. Corruption has been the veritable weapon for government officials to amass wealth and consolidate their economic dominance of the country. Corruption has therefore led to the virtual collapse of public service in the country as well as retrogressed national development. What Nigeria needs now is a new socio-economic and political system that will encourage a culture of good governance, accountability and transparency. When this is done, there will be neither reason nor incentive for public servants in the country to be involved in corruption, and the country can again attain its deserved glory.

## References

Abayomi, John. (2017). Updated: At last, Buhari sacks suspended SGF, NIA boss. *The Punch newspaper*, 30<sup>th</sup> October

Abdulaziz and Busari, Kemi. (2017). Shocking: Buhari administration recalls wanted ex-pension boss sacked for alleged corruption, *Premium Times Nigeria*. October 20.

Adebayo, Moshood and Ojo, James. (2017). "Fresh Trouble for Babachir Lawal". *The Sun Newspaper*. 3 November

Adeboye, J. and Simon, K. (2023). Corruption and Governance: Examining the Historical Context of Corruption in Nigeria. Conference Presentation, University of Calabar, September.

Adewale Ademoyega. (1981). Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup. Ibadan: Evans Brothers, p.191

Agbiboa, Daniel Egiegba (2012). Between Corruption and Development: The Political Economy of State Robbery in Nigeria. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 108 (3) 325-345.

Agedah, Dickson (1993). Corruption and the Stability of the Third Republic. Lagos: Perceptions Communications, p.26.

Anderson, C. and Tverdova, Y. (2003). Corruption, Political Allegiances and Confidence in Government: A Cross-national Analysis. *The Journal of Politics*, 65(4).

Cocks Tim and Brock, Joe. (2015). Special Report: Anatomy of Nigeria's \$20 billion "leak". *Reuters*, February 6, 2015

Ejekwonyilo, Ameh. (2021). *"Updated: Court sentences Maina to eight years in jail for N2 billion pension fraud"*. 11 August.

Emeh, Ikechukwu Eke Jeffrey, Ugwuibe Onyemaechi Christopher and Olise Charles Nnamdi (2019). Good Governance: The Conceptual and Contextual Perspectives. *ACTA Universitatis Danubius Journal*, Vol 11, no 1, pp 114-132.

Enyia, Jacob (2019). The Law of Banking in Nigeria: Principles, Statutes and Guidelines. Nigeria: Malthouse Press. p. 22.

Fourie, D & Jordan, J. (2017). Contextualizing the Measurement of Governance in Public Financial Management. *Journal of Public Administration*, 42 (5), 35-45.

Gboyega, Alex (1996). "An Overview" in Gboyega Alex (ed) (1996). *Corruption and Democratization in Nigeria*. Ibadan: AgboAreo Publishers, pp.8-9

Hoffmann, Leona Koni (2025). Taking Action against Corruption in Nigeria: Empowering Anti-Corruption Role Models and Coalitions to Change Social Norms. London: Chatham House.

Hyden, Goran (2006). African Politics in Comparative Perspective. Cambridge University Press.

Igiebor, G. (2019). Political Corruption in Nigeria: Implications for Economic Development in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 35(4).

Ikpeze, Ogugua V.C. and Wosu, Onyinyechi Gift (2023). Reflections on the Implications of P&ID Case: Challenges and Lessons of Arbitration in Commercial Transactions in Nigeria. *Unizik Law Journal*, 19 (3) 94-104.

Ishola Williams. (1999). "Governance and Corruption", Paper presented at the NACCIMA/CIPE Workshop on Public Policy and Programme Implementation Monitoring in Nigeria, 24-28 October, Gateway Hotel, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State

Izeze, Ifeanyi. (2015). "NNPC/NEITI And Missing \$11.6Bn NLNG Dividends: Another One For Buhari's In-tray ". *Sahara Reporters*, 18 June

Joseph, Richard A. (1987). Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic, Cambridge University Press

Maduagwu, M. O. (1996). "Nigeria in Search of Political Culture: The Political Class, Corruption and Democratization" in Gboyega, Alex (ed.). (1996). *Corruption and Democratization in Nigeria*. Ibadan: AgboAreo Publishers, pp. 15-18.

NOIJPolls (2024). Democracy Day Polls, 12 June. <https://www.noijpolls.com/post/democracy-nigeria>

NACCIMA. (1999). "Corruption and Governance in Nigeria". *Economic Policy Watch*, No3, September, p.13

Office of the Auditor General of the Federation (2024). Annual Audit Report on Non-Compliance-Internal Control Weakness in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. <https://oaugf.ng/docman/42-anual-report-on-non-compliance-internal-control-weakness>.

Ogbeidi, M. (2012). Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria c 1960: A Socio-economic Analysis. *Journal of Nigerian Studies*, 2.

Okoye, Rita (2012). Nigeria has lost \$400bn oil revenue to Corruption since Independence. *Daily Post newspapers*, 31 August

Omitola, B. O. (2003) 'Intra-Party and Inter-Party Crises in Nigerian Politics: Implications for the Sustainability of the Fourth Republic,' *International Review of Politics and Development*, 1: 143-152.

Onah, E. I. (2010). *Introduction to African Government and Politics*. Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd.

Onimade, B. (1987). *An Introduction to Marxist Political Economy*. London: Zed Books

Osunmuyiwa, Olufolahan, Frank Biermann, and Agni Kalfagianni. (2018). "Applying the multi-level perspective on socio-technical transitions to rentier states: The case of renewable energy transitions in Nigeria." *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 20, no. 2: 143-156.)

Nikitin, P. I. (1983). *Fundamentals of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, p.26

Pallister, David. (2000). "Comment & Analysis: Pennies from Heaven: Many of Nigeria's missing millions were laundered through greedy banks in London", *The Guardian* (London), September 7

PwC (2021). Impact of Corruption on Nigeria's Economy. <https://pwc.to/34cEH54>. Accessed 05 October 2025.

Ribadu, Nuhu. (2013). N5.7b fraud: Why ex-IGP Tafa Balogun was arrested, jailed. *Latest Nigeria News*. 09 April.

Rose-Ackerman, Susan and Palifka, Bonnie J. (1999). *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences and Reform*. Cambridge University Press.

Tanzi, Vito (1995). "Corruption, Arm's Length Relationships and Markets", in Fiorentini, Gianluca and Sam Peltzman, eds., *The Economics of Organized Crime*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 161-180.

Transparency International. (2023). Nigeria: Anti-corruption Agenda for the Next Government. <https://transparency.org/en/news/nigeria- anti-corruption-agenda-for-the-next-government>

Urien, J. (2024). The Impact of Corruption on the Socio-economic Development of Nigeria. *ESUT Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(2).

Williams, Ishola "Code of Conduct for Ministers and Special Advisers of the Federal Government of Nigeria", in Williams, Ishola. (1999). "Governance and Corruption", Paper presented at the NACCIMA/CIPE Workshop on Public Policy and Programme Implementation Monitoring in Nigeria, 24-28 October, Gateway Hotel, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Appendix 8.

Wrong, Michela (2009). *It's Our Turn to Eat*. London: Fourth Estate.

"Labour Minister sacked in corruption scandal. (2003) .*The New Humanitarian*. <https://shop.un.org/rights->.

"Oil worth \$13.7bn stolen under NNPC, says NEITI", (2025). *Punch newspaper*. <https://punchng.com/news/oil-worth-13-7bn-stolen-under-nnpc-says-neiti/> retrieved on 29 July.

"The third term bribery allegation". (2011). *Vanguard News*". 22 May

United Nations Development Programme (2014). Governance for Sustainable Human Development: Integrating Governance in the Post-2015 Development Framework. Discussion Paper.

World Bank. (2023). Migration and Development Brief 38. <https://www.knomad.org>

World Bank. (1994). Governance: The World Bank's Experience. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2009).