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# **Organized corruption an impediment to the socio-economic survival of Nigeria; An MDAs perspective.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The prevalent nature of corruption in the nation's leadership paradigm took on an unending canker-like connotation to the point that it not only permeated every segment of the population but also emerged as one of the most potent variables influencing the distribution of social amenities and opportunities in the country. This paper applies a qualitative approach to analyze the escalation of corruption in ministries, departments, and agencies in Nigeria. The paper submits that any nation's socioeconomic and political worth is undermined by the intricate and multidimensional nature of organized corruption amongst the privileged few, especially those on the front lines of public service. It finds that all forms of corruption have an impact on all departments of nationhood, such as the electricity sector, mining and petroleum, the judicial system, and political administration. Thus, it becomes a necessity for all stakeholders to collaboratively work together to reduce this phenomenon in Nigeria because the upsurge in corruption in modern-day Nigerian society left both policymakers and citizens alike dolorous and disappointed. This disappointment can be addressed by adhering strictly to the provisions of the law at all levels, especially during appointments into public service; appointments must be made on merit.

Key words: organized, corruption, impediment, socio-economic, survival, MDAs,

## **Introduction**

In most developing countries, public service has suffered from a deteriorating perception of competence, honesty, integrity, and conflict of interest. Politicians and career government employees routinely abuse their powerful positions to pursue their own agendas and enrich

themselves through corruption (Mau & Johnson-Rokosu, 2015). For this reason, the government establishes anti-corruption agencies and promulgates a number of laws and regulations at the state and federal levels. However, despite these efforts, the problem of corruption persists, compelling concerned parties to question and investigate the rationale behind the establishment of these heavily funded government-funded anti-corruption agencies. Despite the advancements these laws and institutions have made, corruption remains pervasive in public life. Corruption thrives in situations where a small number of people have all the authority and when federal decentralization is not properly implemented.

A global ill that diminishes a nation's socioeconomic and political value is corruption in the MDAs; these aberrations are multifaceted, intricate, and subtle (Osakede *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, corruption is a worldwide phenomenon that affects all countries, but its impacts are more likely to ripple through underdeveloped countries. The phenomena include abuses by private parties such as influence peddling, bribery, extortion, and fraud, as well as abuses by governmental officials, including cronyism and embezzlement. (Osakede *et al.*, 2015). Given that corruption has eroded the benefits of excellent economic policies that would have led to a complete transformation of the nation, the very effects of corruption are evident in the rise in crime, kidnapping, unemployment, and social discontent among the nation's federating units (Okwuwada 2023). The bureaucratic circus officials' corruption and impunity threaten democratic processes, good governance, and moral business practices.

### **Statement of problem**

This paper integrates the political and administrative machinery of the state with a public service perspective, placing it in tandem with political science and public administration to understand the organized current trend of reported corrupt practices increasing in Ministries departments and agencies in Nigeria. Which was largely missing in previous studies. The public service, with the complicity of those holding political office and each serving as a stooge for the other, remains the most corrupt institution in Nigeria. As a result, they oversee the coordination of federal ministries, provide political authorities with advice, develop and carry out government programs, collect and provide data to decision-makers, and guarantee service continuity and public relations (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023). The provision of essential services that residents are unable to supply for themselves

is the cornerstone of all government programs and policies. In the absence of robust public services, the government cannot operate effectively. Nevertheless, it is disheartening to observe that the Nigerian Civil Service has been beset by several problems over the years, all of which point to corruption: soliciting for bribes before service, stealing of public funds and properties, a poor attitude toward transparency, poor professional standards, a wasteful culture, and an unnecessarily large workforce structure called ghost workers.

According to Adeniran (2019), Nigerians paid as much as six hundred and seventy-five billion naira as bribes in 2018. An astounding amount more than the majority of ministers', departments', and agencies' annual budgetary allocation. In 2018, for example, the government budget for health was two hundred and sixty-nine billion Naira, while the federal budget for education was four hundred and thirty-nine billion Naira (Adeniran 2019). Each ministry receives less than the bribery payment made during the same period. Officials' reporting of corrupt practices and misconduct has remained hidden despite whistleblower laws because of the actions of the ministry's help desk administrators and employees' fear of being targeted out or victimized by their coworkers and superiors. Fear of reprisals, meaninglessness (no one would care), and regularity (no need to reveal) are the main reasons for the low reporting rate. - MDAs that are impacted have the power to change these systems (Adeniran 2019). This article aims to assess the role that ministries, departments, and agencies have played in the national rise of corruption.

Development and corruption have a strong inverse relationship; as corruption rises, so does public and private revenue diminish. It is apparent when comparing the rate of advancement made in industrialized nations with lower levels of corruption to emerging nations with higher levels of corruption. Upon further examination of the data from Transparency International, clearly industrialized nations have a very high corruption index score than developing nations, indicating a very low occurrence of corruption in developed nations. With very high development indices and very low corruption index scores, it was evident the effect corruption has on the national development strategies of a nation. Suggesting that corruption limits and obstructs development (Okeke 2020). Essentially, this negates the advantages that people will experience from specific social infrastructure development. As a result, decreasing corruption in all its dimensions is essential for improving the nation's prosperity, peace, and service delivery (Oldfield, 2023).

## **Theoretical perspectives**

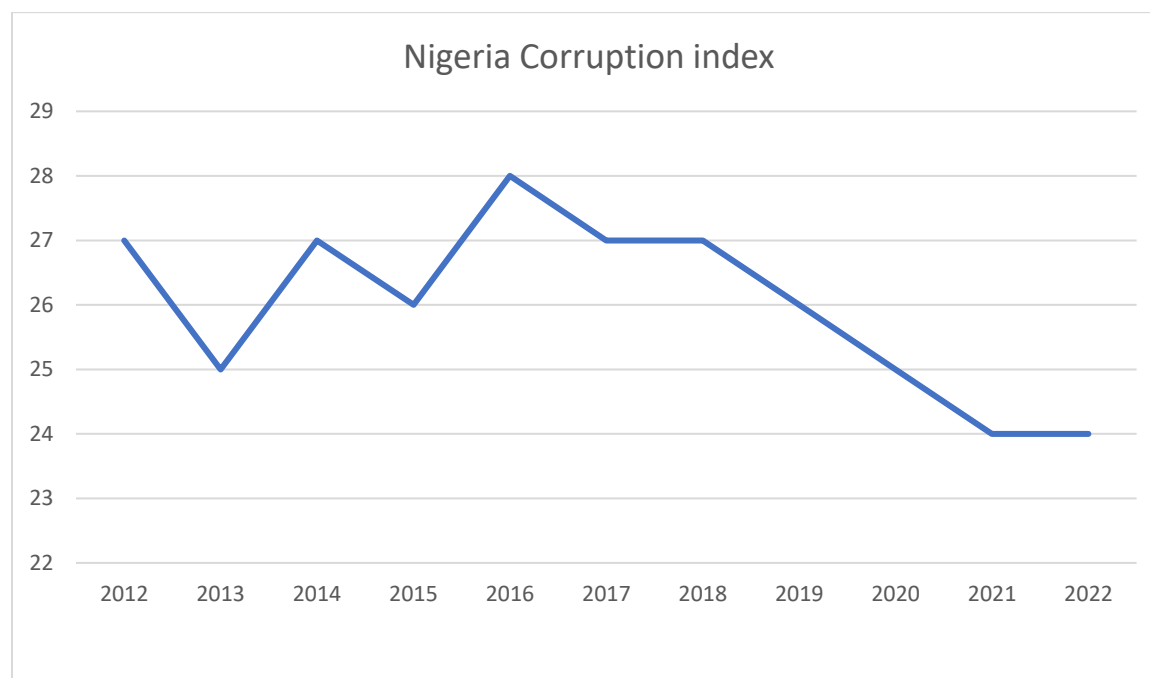
Although corruption is a global problem with deep historical roots, it manifests itself differently in every nation due to its distinct power structures and moral and legal systems that regulate it. The market-centered approach is based on market theories, which hold that employees should see their workplaces as businesses from which they must maximize profits (Atakpa & Akpan, 2015). As a result, MDAs become a free market where the highest bidder wins the service, and the fundamental mechanisms of allocative equilibrium are rendered irrelevant. Supporters of this viewpoint contend that corruption has changed significantly as a result of the shift in public office norms from a mandatory pricing model to a free-market approach (Tilman, 1970, pp. 62–64). Due to corruption, practically every part of Nigeria is under siege and needs holistic transformations.

Jensen & Meckling (1976) define an agency relationship as a contract in which one or more parties (the main) choose another party (the agent) to provide a service on their behalf, giving the agent some degree of decision-making authority. The fundamental idea here is that the people of Nigeria give the political leadership authority by voting on a regular basis to act on their behalf. Stated differently, directors and other professional management are employed to provide supervision, but CEOs and other shareholders of public companies are often not involved in day-to-day operations (Albrecht et al., 2004). Career civil officials are appointed as agents by the governmental Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) because they are trusted to act on behalf of the principals, who are the people of the country. The principle-agent perspective holds that giving confidence and accountability to the agent encourages opportunistic persons to pursue objectives that are incompatible with the sovereignty of the people, such as executive fraud. Therefore, career government employees often turn to unethical means to enhance their personal interests, which causes them to lose the trust of the principal (citizen).

Numerous theories, such as rent-seeking, cultural relativity, the theory of imitation, low pay and strong familial ties, institutional theory or protection, and the concept of replication, can be used to explain the reasons behind dishonesty practices in Nigeria (Mau & Johnson-Rokosu 2015). Regardless of the origins or justification, corruption is corruption, and anyone found guilty should be harshly reprimanded. This is the standard in industrialized nations, where no one is above the law, regardless of social status, affiliations, or paternity. As usual, Nigeria appears to lack some

political will and wiggle room when it comes to prosecuting and expelling corrupt individuals. Many public officials have taken advantage of the gap in the prosecution of the corrupt caused by leadership failure, judicial corruption, and enforcement complicity. When the guard is dishonest, for example, where does the homeowner's safety end up?

Beyond public official bribery, Nigerian corruption possibilities now include academic dishonesty, budget doctoring, mutilation and padding, petty stealing, certificates without proof of work completed, ethnocentrism, plagiarism, overstaffing, document falsification, breaking into people's bank accounts and stealing, money laundering, vote buying, ballot box snatching, under-declared goods at the ports, diversion of containers, falsification of clearing and duty papers, police brutality and intimidation, illicit arms deals, exam malpractices, and many more. (Osakede *et al.*, 2015).



Source: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/nga>

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for this year indicates that corruption levels worldwide are at an all-time low (Transparency International 2023). Nigerian corruption has surged recently in spite of the efforts of stakeholders and policymakers. According to Transparency International statistics, there is clear evidence of corruption, with levels of twenty-eight points in 2012 and

twenty-four points in 2022 at an all-time low indicating its prevalence. An indication that corruption is still pervasive in Nigerian society. As stated by Oldfields (2023), Nigeria's widespread corruption is mostly caused by foreign actors and corrupt political structural networks. Punch News Online reports on January 15, 2024, state that the anticorruption agency has reopened its investigation into the theft, mismanagement, and outright corruption of about seven hundred and seventy-two billion Naira. Sufficient funds to boost the economy, address the infrastructure shortfall, and promote national progress have been coveted by individuals through corrupt means.

### **What is corruption?**

Khan (2005) defines corruption as the abuse of power for one's own benefit and includes political donations, kickbacks, cronyism, favoritism, forgery, deceit, bribery, nepotism, and many other types of fraud. Additionally, Mau (2015) defines corruption as financial statement falsification, asset theft or abuse, and inappropriate use of influence in a transaction for one's own benefit. It is defined by the World Bank as the abuse of official power for one's own gain (World Bank, 1997). As defined by Transparency International, "it is the misuse of authority for personal benefit." A public employee who solicits or obtains a promise, accepts a gift, or receives any other advantage in return for carrying out or neglecting to carry out an act is in violation of the duties assigned to their office (Ukaeje 2022). Corruption is sustained under the cover of ministries, departments, and agencies via any combination of embezzlement, misappropriation, bribery, receiving, solicitation, or extortion using their positions.

According to Mitrevska (2019), there are two primary types of corruption: institutional and non-institutional personal corruption. In essence, this article is about institutionalized corruption that occurs within ministries and agencies, either through their proxies or staff members. For instance, some police officers are supposed to provide money to their unit leaders or the divisional police officer once they return from regular patrol so that it may be forwarded to their superiors. Citizens become the primary target for extortion, harassment, intimidation, and, in some cases, assassination when they cannot afford to pay a bribe to the police officers, while others face imprisonment and false accusations for offenses they weren't guilty of. Ironically, some police officers even carry illegal substances on them, and if a citizen becomes distracted by threats, they place the drug on him and get him charged with a crime he did not commit. Such that corruption

pertains to a person's moral character and entails the tainting of their moral character (Ukaeje, 2022).

According to Miller (2017), institutional power and social influence are exercised simultaneously by institutional authorities in ministries, departments, and agencies, assuming the existence of an institution. These authorities look on while the institution is gravely polarized with corruption. Public officials waste money, especially in third-world nations, without thinking about how their actions can affect the people living there or the country's standing abroad if their horrible actions are exposed (Mau & Johnso-Rokosu 2015). Perpetuated constantly because they feel protected and are referred to as sacred cows. Politicians cover up their own corrupt acts by appointing people who have a tendency toward corruption.

### **Origin of corruption in ministries, departments, and agencies**

The existing public service administrative structure was left over by the former colonialists, especially Nigeria. However, Nigeria and other Africans had their own distinct administrative system before the colonialists arrived, which forbade any kind of fraud, cheating, stealing, and other wrongdoing. In order to ensure that the legal system and administration were fair and impartial, the chiefs governed alongside sub-chiefs, with the backing of elders in council. When there is a dispute between information and statistics about lands or any other part of the clan, the clan's deity, who is greatly respected and venerated due to their immense spiritual power, makes the final judgment. The deity can strike dead anyone who flouts the rules of the community or engages in an abomination. The penalty meted out by the gods for anybody found stealing, lying, killing, or engaging in any other criminal activity is either being sent into the evil forest or being struck to death. To teach a lesson to others and prevent evil from occurring in society, the deity can strike one guilty individual dead or afflicted with an unusual ailment.

The arrival of the colonialists changed this narrative with the introduction of religions and corruption. Boenner (2020) argues that during the colonial era, a joint-stock company regulation allowed the spread of this corruption to Africa. He said, "The significant governance shortcomings in Nigeria were initially noted in the former colonial nation of Great Britain" (Bönner, 2020). For example, the Oil Rivers Protectorate's merchants, in particular, engaged in dishonest business



methods, which the British did not even acknowledge (Ojo 2021). However, they were publicly maintained—possibly because it benefited the British. Evidence abounds that shows colonial rulers stole money, gold, diamonds, antiques, and other assets from Africa, particularly Nigeria, with impunity. This incentivized their Nigerian employees, who worked as subordinates, to pilfer even more (Ojo 2021). Due to the corrupt practices of Nigerian colonial officials, the people joined them in money laundering, tampering with export crops and produce, income tax fraud, absenteeism trafficking, and stealing from community coffers. Also, rationalizing corruption has necessitated unprecedented decay in public administration; justice is openly denied, and qualified applicants are denied jobs, leaving citizens with resentment against the state.

### **Corruption in MDAs**

Companies have the ability to exert influence on the judiciary alongside requests made by the legislative and executive branches of government (Human Rights Report 2013). This method, which heavily relies on financial gain, tends to skew Nigerians' desire for justice and the administration of justice. Even obtaining a passport has become a lucrative endeavor for certain immigration officials and their associates, who demand payments over the authorized amount to assist applicants in obtaining a passport. Numerous Federal Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) have inflated their budgets to the tune of N18.62, according to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) (Enudi 2024). While inadequate compensation does not justify public workers' involvement in corrupt activities, it is important to acknowledge that Nigerian public government officers get extremely low pay, with a minimum salary of less than 30,000 Naira, or less than \$30 USD. Given the rise in inflation and devaluation, that amount is insignificant in catering to daily family needs.

According to the independent commission on corrupt practices, the bulk of the MDAs at fault were declared to be university and medical institutions by the ICPC in 2019. Punch News Online reported on December 22, 2021, that MDAs are also involved in corrupt practices nationwide, citing the University of Benin Teaching Hospital N1.1bn, Federal Medical Center, Bayelsa N915m, Nnamdi Azikwe University N907m, University of Jos N896m, University College Hospital Ibadan N701m, Usman Dan Fodio University N636m, and University of Ibadan N558m as examples (Ojo 2021). Even while the nation struggles with a massive budget deficit,

deteriorating infrastructure, poverty, unemployment, and social decadence, public funds allotted to government ministries are being embezzled by officials.

According to Etim (2022), Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) of Nigerian government officials sometimes act as if they are above the law. They feel shielded by the politician who nominated them for these positions, which makes this conceivable. Conversely, corrupt acts are carried out by career civil servants and street-level bureaucrats due to gaps in the nation's moral and ethical standards. For instance, it is typical for Nigerian police to solicit bribes from civilians prior to performing their official tasks; justice is now cash and carry. Before passing a student, some lecturers take bribes, have sex for grades, and engage in other unethical behavior. Higher education students purchase highlighted, copied, and printed pamphlets; those who cannot afford them are doomed to failure. The degree of impunity with which some professors deceive defenseless students in order to extract money is alarming. They clearly state that you have two options: pay or carry over (a phrase used to refer to repeating a course).

The evidence of widespread and multifaceted corruption shows that the threat can be controlled if everyone works collaboratively. For example, a British court denied a P&ID \$11 billion damages case against Nigeria in 2023. Several factors led to the case's dismissal, including the contract award's tainted status due to fraud and bribery (Adamolekun, 2023). The court determined that P&ID's lack of experience in gas operations was insufficient to support the undertaking of such a significant project in Nigeria. Raising up the issue of shady corruption that affects practically all pertinent departments, ministries, and organizations. Furthermore, the disclosure in an official document that Beta Edu, the minister for humanitarian affairs, had directed funds for underprivileged groups to be transferred into a private account for a total of 585 million Naira (\$663,000) resulted in her suspension (Abubakar, 2024). Also, the present investigation by the EFCC is focused on N37.1 billion (N37,170,855,753.44) that officials of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development—which was then led by Mrs. Umar-Farouk as the minister—claimed to have laundered (Agbo 2024).

The urgent question is: How can a governor or minister embezzle so much money from state or federal coffers when they are not technocrats at the ministry, not the ministry's accountant, or the ministry's financial secretary? Then there needs to be strong collusion and cooperation between

the politicians and ministry officials, which has now permeated the legal system and turned some judges and magistrates into yet another clearinghouse and forwarding agency for the corrupt. For instance, even in cases where the anti-graft agency has sufficient evidence to convict a former government official of misappropriation of public funds, a court in Nigeria issues an indefinite injunction prohibiting the investigative authority from investigating and prosecuting.

### **Causes of corruption at the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies in Nigeria**

Nobody makes the argument more persuasively than Olateju (2015), who contends that genuine and long-lasting economic progress and development would never be possible if those in positions of public trust continuously encourage corruption and reap the rewards of it. The political and bureaucratic space is established by a structural and legal framework that makes it seem difficult for one party to engage in corrupt practices without the other party acting as an accomplice, a conduit, an adversary, or a rival for the proceeds of corruption. Politicians would find it exceedingly difficult to engage in corruption if public servants refused to be willing participants in unscrupulous plans or to be used as tools for dishonest aims (Atakpa & Akpan 2023).

Although the military and civilian governments in Nigeria may be blamed for the increase in corruption, public service, religious tolerance, and ethnic conspiracy are the common factors that enable the corrupt practices to continue. With complete disregard for current laws that make corruption of any kind illegal, it is important to note that although there are many laws in Nigeria that prohibit corruption and the corrupt, the issue nevertheless persists because of powerful players' plots and the acceptance of corruption as the standard. According to Oldfield (2023), this is the reason why shortcomings attributable to ethnic parochial feeling have undermined the effectiveness of relevant organizations in the fight against corruption. It is difficult to fight corruption and its ramifications when family members defend a relative who has been found engaging in corrupt activities. In an attempt to naively absolve their consanguinities, traditional leaders—who are crucial protagonists in the battle against corruption—are occasionally found innocuous, as seen by the African saying, "They may be thieves, but they are our thief."

A national conversation has revolved around the hypothesis of the origins of corruption, with different institutions covering up the essential elements of a corrupt society. The benefits of

excellent administration, commitment, and dedication have been eliminated by corruption, which has increased skepticism throughout the whole nation. Infecting the morally pure and eradicating the ideals that our cultural and traditional heritage, which detests all sorts of wrongdoing, has imprinted upon us. No society can flourish with the height of corruption that Nigeria has witnessed in the recent past. Based on this assumption, Dukor (2010) asserts that individuals in traditional culture who take their theism seriously believe that a boomerang or nemesis is inflicted upon someone who defies the rules of God. This reduces the inclination and desire to engage in any criminal activity.

### **Corruption, Bribery, and Fraud in MDAs**

The deliberate distortion of facts with the goal of deceiving another person in order to gain an advantage is called fraud. Fraud is the term for using a position of trust improperly for dishonest gain, such as by taking a bribe (Vinod, 2012). The government exists to deliver public goods and services through its agents; nevertheless, taxpayers automatically pay more than the legally permitted fees when there is significant bribery involved prior to the services being obtained. Bribery is defined as any payment made outside of legally permitted statutory official fees, while fraud is defined as a means of obtaining monetary or financial rewards without providing proof of labor performed. It is fraud when someone presents false goods, false promises, or falsified documents in order to benefit financially, monetarily, or personally. The basic goal of establishing that institution is thwarted by any attempt to absolve anyone of any wrongdoing in violation of the norms of natural justice.

### **Conclusions**

Stemming out the menace of corruption will require total cooperation from all stakeholders and institutions, including families, religious, traditional, academic, judicial, and all other forms of organized units in the country. Nigeria's progress has been hampered by corruption, which is made more severe when officials turn these roles into platforms for market-driven opportunities focused on personal gain rather than carrying out their duties with integrity in accordance with current governance norms and ethics. The study examined how ministries' debarments and agencies' contributions served as a cornerstone for all other types of corrupt activities in Nigeria.

Considering that a politician cannot effectively carry out and sustain any significant corrupt conduct without the public servant's direct participation.

## **Recommendations**

Since corruption in Nigeria has currently become a national issue, it should be incorporated into all school curricula, from upper primary to university. The course should be compulsory for all disciplines.

Traditional approaches should complement conventional legal methods in the administration of speedy trials for corruption-related matters.

Positions should be filled on the basis of qualifications, not favoritism, nepotism, and cronyism. Those who are morally upright and qualified should be given the chance to serve.

A nationwide complaint, investigation, and reporting bureau or code should be established to ensure complete independence from political meddling in order to swiftly investigate and convict violators. It should be possible for them to look into complaints made against public officials without endangering the complainant.

The salaries of street-level bureaucrats should be reasonably increased to meet their current threshold and cushion their daily needs.

Let all authority figures—religious, traditional, family, and academic—condemn and inquire about any unethical means of obtaining money, as well as any mysterious show of riches. Honor diligence, professionalism, and discipline. Calling a thief "a thief" means exposing and denouncing all dishonest people and preventing them and their families from taking advantage of any public benefits that the nation has to offer.

To completely replace in-person interactions, technology needs to be thoroughly integrated into the functioning of every ministry department and agency.

Judges should be free to conduct their jobs without fear of intimidation from wealthy people, and there should be little political meddling in the administration of justice.

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