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Impact of Corruption on Public Service Delivery in Nigeria: Implications for Political Leadership and Economic Development

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Abstract: This paper interrogates the impact of corruption on public service delivery in Nigeria, and the implications for political leadership and economic development. The paper argues that corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society, as ‘almost a third of the nation’s population pay bribes when they come in contact with public officials’, according to Transparency International. Political office holders use their offices to divert public funds to private use, while corruption cases drag for years without the suspects being punished. This has encouraged members of successive governments to steal as their individual and collective greed dictate. As a result, social services have been crippled in critical sectors like education, health, agriculture, transport. The paper also demonstrates that pervasive corruption has had far-reaching implications for political leadership and economic development. Hence, the citizenry has lost confidence in the capacity of political leaders to provide even its most basic needs. The paper relies on secondary sources for data, and uses Percentage, Table, Frequency and Comparison to analyze the trajectory of Nigeria’s corruption empire, with emphasis on the uninterrupted years of so-called democratic rule (1999 - date). The study reveals, among other things, that the failure of government to punish offenders is responsible for the unending menace of official corruption in Nigeria. It concludes that leadership failure is inevitable, so long as corruption remains unchecked. Practical and practicable recommendations are then made, for dealing with the menace of corruption.

Introduction

Corruption has become pervasive in Nigeria, to the extent that almost every citizen now sees the practice as part the national culture. A third of the population would willingly offer bribe to public officials when they want to enjoy services from government. Political office holders use their offices to divert public funds to private use. Corruption cases drag for years without the suspects being punished, and this has encouraged members of successive governments to steal as their individual and collective greed dictate. For instance, N21. 63 trillion and \$47.4 billion were stolen over a period of fifteen years (1999 - 2015), with N7. 9 trillion and \$17. 8 billion of the alleged fraud involving men, N8.9 trillion and \$20 billion involving women, and N4.2 billion and \$9. 6 billion involving corporate bodies. Again, a staggering 34 trillion in Ways and Means borrowing, and several trillions of naira more in foreign borrowings were stolen during the eight-year period – 2015 to 2023. Nigeria also lost 15 billion dollars in fraudulent arms procurement deals under Muhammadu Buhari's government.

The result has been that; all the nation's textile companies are now dead. The national airline has collapsed. All the four Steel Rolling Companies at Ajaokuta, Aladja, Katsina and Jos have packed up. The road and railway networks are in a sorry state. Hospitals and educational establishments are crippled by lack of funding. The naira is exchanging at 1,498.79 to one dollar as at the time of writing. Meanwhile, the Nigerian military, which restored peace in other African countries at one time or the other, has failed to combat insurgency in troubled parts of the country such as Borno, Zamfara, Kaduna, Plateau, Sokoto and the Niger Delta.

The public service institution itself has suffocated for decades under the weight of a myriad of insurmountable bottlenecks. As a former Head of Service of the Federation once said, *"The Service is often perceived by many as corrupt, outdated in technology, lacking in professionalism and creativity, slow in responding to issues, and structurally weak."*

Objective of the Study

The paper interrogates the specific ways in which the specter of corruption has impacted, and continues to impact socio-economic life in Nigeria. The paper is predicated on the assumption that, corruption is the single most important factor for the failure of governance in Nigeria, in terms of provision of security and other social amenities which make life meaningful for the populace. The study focuses on the uninterrupted years of democratic rule in Nigeria - years that have also ushered in unprecedented corruption (1999 - date).

Studies that I have read on the subject have failed to offer pragmatic solutions to the challenge posed to society by corruption. This study is intended to fill that gap.

Conceptualizing Corruption

Corruption is defined here as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Public service is used in this paper to refer to all the institutions of government which serve, or are supposed to serve, public interests. The abuse of entrusted power in an enterprise can harm both the perpetrator and everyone else. Corruption kills people. It destroys a nation, and systematically kills Work. At the macro level, it impacts education, health, social security, agriculture, transport, housing and national security. Corruption also

erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and environmental crisis⁴. The symptoms of corruption include forging of someone else's signature, cutting corners, employing or promoting people to ranks they're not qualified for; giving or taking bribe; diverting funds meant for public good, to private or personal use; keeping public funds in private accounts, or keeping private money in public accounts; abandoning a public-owned project after its commencement, even when funds have been made available for the completion; creating phantom budgets for such abandoned projects, and turning round to share such monies.

It is rather sad that corruption is working creatively and fantastically for its sponsors in many countries of the world today, including Nigeria, despite legislation. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) unequivocally prohibits corruption in whatever guise. Chapter 2 Section 15(5) specifically imposes responsibility on government to "abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power" in the country.

The UN Convention against Corruption, and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, to which Nigeria is a state party, similarly obligate government to effectively prevent and investigate allegations of corruption and mismanagement of public funds, including loans obtained by the country. Specifically, article 26 of the UN convention requires government to ensure the enforcement of "effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions, including criminal and non-criminal sanctions, in cases of grand corruption". However, this has not happened in all of

the nation's history.

Statement of the Problem

Social services have been crippled in critical sectors like education, health, agriculture, transport, housing and national security due to the reign of corruption over the years. This is despite repeated pronouncements by successive political leaders that they would "do everything possible to speed up economic development by stemming the tide of official corruption," among other strategies. In reality, however, corruption has increasingly become endemic throughout Nigeria, and has eroded public trust in governance, weakened democracy, hampered economic development and further exacerbated inequality, poverty, social division and environmental crisis.

Significance of Study

This study has come at a time Nigeria is reaping, in great abundance, the fruits of decades of unbridled corruption. From the End-Sars Movement of 2020, to the fuel subsidy-induced End-Bad-Governance nationwide protests in 2024, Nigerians have eloquently unleashed their anger and frustration in the hands of a highly corrupt leadership.

This study would provide useful insights to the people's agitations for a political leadership that is truly committed to elimination of all forms of corruption in the country.

Literature Review

Several factors would make reaching a consensus on the causes of, and solutions to corruption a bit problematic. Writing in the volume 3 edition of *IFRA on Corruption in Military and Civilian Regimes in Nigeria since 1999*, Edger Agubamah (2009), lists some of these factors to include (i) the uniqueness of each society and or country; (ii) the dynamic or changing nature of the socio

political and economic interactions within the global community; and (iii) the differences in the perception of corrupt practices by different academic disciplines. Consequently, there have been as many approaches to the study of corruption as the number of opportunity costs of corrupt behavior. I review below two of these approaches.

Functionalist and rational choice theories of corruption

To date, functionalist and rational choice explanations have been the dominant theoretical approaches to the study of corruption. Both approaches, however, face a number of challenges in explaining corrupt behavior, as we shall see shortly. Functional psychology and behavioural functionalism emerged within psychology in the first half of the 20th century, to explain patterns in human behaviour as the result of response to external stimuli and adaptation to one's environment (c.f. Angell 1907).

In political science, functionalist explanations of corruption appeared in the work of scholars such as Samuel Huntington (1968), who viewed corruption as a way to “grease the wheels” to get things done, especially for investors and companies (Marquette and Pfeiffer 2015; Manzetti and Wilson 2007). According to this view, corruption is a way of quickly cutting through burdensome regulatory requirements, distributing resources, and generating economic growth (ibid).

A fairly large but inconclusive body of literature has emerged within the field of economics on the *greasing* versus *sanding the wheels* debate, with authors finding evidence that both supports and challenges the greasing the wheels theory (c.f. Dreher and Gassebner 2013; Méon and Sekkat 2005; Méon 2010). Marquette and Pfeiffer (2015) extend this logic to

non-investors in a neo-functionalist argument, arguing that corruption can be viewed as a form of “problem-solving”, a useful way of dealing with problems that people face.

Neo-patrimonialism

Neo-patrimonialism, as defined by [Clapham](#), is a “...form of organization in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines” ([Christopher Clapham](#), *The Nature of the Third World State*). It is a system in which an office of power is used for personal uses and gains, as opposed to a strict division of the private and public spheres. Neo-patrimonialism may underlie or supplant the [bureaucratic](#) structure of the state in that only those with connections have the real power, not those who hold higher positions.

Origin and definition

Neopatrimonialism as a distinct term is generally held to have originated with [Shmuel N. Eisenstadt](#), in his 1973 book *Traditional Patrimonialism and Modern Neo-patrimonialism*, deriving it from [Max Weber's](#) term, '[patrimonialism](#)', who used the term to describe a system of rule based on administrative and military personnel, who were responsible only to the ruler. Neopatrimonialism, which is a modern form of the traditional Patrimonial form of rule, is a mixed system. Here, elements of patrimonial and rational-bureaucratic rule co-exist and are sometimes interwoven.

As noted by Adefulu Razaq (2007), the basic features of neo-patrimonialism include: (i) officials who hold positions in bureaucratic organizations exercise such power not as a form of public service, but see their position rather as a matter of private property relationship with other members of society; (ii) the relationship

between officials and their clients or underlings then becomes one of personal subordination, as state officials treat their posts as personal fiefdom, use them to extract bribes or to appoint relatives to lucrative offices, even where the latter are not qualified. (iii) On their part, the subordinates cannot take official decisions without referring them upwards, because to do otherwise would be tantamount to slighting the authority of the boss. (iv) Because this system of social relations breeds subordination, it is often easy for common folks to worship political office holders, even as the latter are daily enriching themselves through corrupt means.

It would thus become difficult to eliminate corruption from the society, since almost everyone looks forward to partaking in the proceeds thereof.

Relevance of Neo-patrimonialism

Being the vertical distribution of resources that give rise to patron-client networks based around a powerful individual or party, neo-patrimonialism was once argued as necessary for unification and development after decolonization (see [Nicolas van de Walle](#), in *Democratic Reform in Africa*, 2005). Though neo-patrimonialism seems like a form of corruption through coercion, it is not regarded as corrupt behavior by most countries where neopatrimonialism is present.

Methodology

Literature Review is the major tool used for data collection in this study, while Table, Comparison, Frequency and Percentage have been employed to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion of Findings

It would be an under-statement to say that corruption has a heavy presence in Nigeria. It is especially more pervasive in the public sector, with the high and the

low playing active roles in the perpetration of corrupt practices. The citizens are particularly known for their willingness to give or to take bribe when they want to enjoy social services from the state. A survey by the National Bureau of Statistics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicate that Four Hundred billion Naira (N400, 000,000,000) was paid to public officials as bribes each year between 2015 and 2023. The report is corroborated by Transparency International when it says, “almost a third of the nation’s population pay bribes when they come in contact with public officials.” Most of the country’s former governors “have been facing charges of fraud, money laundering and misappropriation of funds in the last one and a half decades, according to a report of the Human and Environmental Development Agenda (HEDA) Resource Centre.

Fourteen former governors, eight erstwhile Ministers and Special Advisers, and five senators were among 100 high-profile individuals fingered in alleged corruption cases involving N21. 63 trillion and \$47.4 billion over a period of fifteen years (1999 - 2015), with the N7. 9 trillion and \$17. 8 billion of the alleged fraud involving men, N8.9 trillion and \$20 billion involving women, and N4.2 billion and \$9. 6 billion involving corporate bodies. Sadly, the country did not fare any better during the 2015 – 2023 era, as some staggering 34 trillion in Ways and Means borrowing, and several trillions of naira more in foreign borrowings all developed wings during those eight years.

Over \$3.6 billion was said to have disappeared from Nigerian public coffers between 2011 and 2015 under the

Goodluck Jonathan administration. The amount was more than half of Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves of \$27 billion during the period. In the same vein, Nigeria reportedly lost 15 billion dollars in fraudulent arms procurement deals under Buhari's government. The break down shows that "in 2015, the military spent N397 billion on arms; in 2016, N444 billion; in 2017, N495 billion; in N2018; N654 billion; in 2019; N669 billion." Service chiefs who held the military command under President Muhammadu Buhari for about six years reportedly spent more than N2.659 trillion on military arms and ammunition between 2015 and 2019. The N2.659 trillion was outside the controversial \$1 billion Excess Crude Account Fund which was approved by Buhari in April 2018 despite public outcry.

Analysts estimate that the stolen sums of money could have built 1,500 kilometers of roads, and around 500 schools. They also estimate that by 2030, these high profile thefts could cost citizens of the country one thousand dollars per person, and further worsen the current inequality crisis. Officials who are alleged to have stolen public funds to the tune of billions and trillions would be arrested by anti-graft agencies, and then nothing is ever heard again after the arrest; or the trial could go on for years. A very painful example is that sixty-one, out of one hundred corruption trials are ongoing at the time of writing this paper, one and a half decades after the offences were committed. Besides that, no government and no anti-graft agency in the country has been able to stop the reign of corruption till date. Rather, monies recovered from former looters of the national economy have been ironically re-looted, either by officials of Central Bank of Nigeria, or by the anti-graft officials themselves.

A few examples will suffice to prove this point. A former minister of petroleum resources, Mrs. Diezani Allison Maduekwe, was alleged by the Ibrahim Magu-led Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to have stolen 23 billion Naira, and part of this money was recovered by EFCC. The US department of justice was reported to have recovered over 53 million dollars from Deziani's fraud proceeds. Ironically, Mr. Magu himself was later arrested and detained for allegedly stealing the funds recovered from not only Deziani, but other looters of the national treasury.

The nation also witnessed how some 9.01 billion Pounds Sterling, 4.09 billion Swiss Franc, 800 million US Dollars and 3.01 million Deutschmark said to have been recovered from the former Military Head of State, General Sani Abacha, and the 1.0 billion Pound Sterling, 2.00 billion Swiss Franc, 1.3 billion US Dollars and 700 million Deutschmark recovered from his National Security Adviser, Ismaila Gwarzo, were similarly re-looted. 13.9 billion Naira and 4.8 billion Naira (in cash and property) were also said to have been recovered from a former Chief of Air Staff, and another 4.5 million and 29 million Naira (in cash and property) from a former Chief of Naval Staff by the EFCC.

Other financial recoveries in Nigeria's recent history include 8 billion and 4 billion Naira in cash and property from a former Chief of Defence Staff; 40 billion, 1.1 billion in cash and property from a former Controller-General of Nigerian Customs Service. Appendix 1 provides more details about the trajectory of some of the reported cases of corruption in Nigeria.

As noted by the Human and Environmental Development Agenda Resource Centre in a 77-page report:

It became a regular practice celebrating those notorious for corruption and financial crime offences in the country such that those accused are not only revered and celebrated and elevated by social and religious institutions, but societies also elect them into otherwise respectable offices... “the 2019 elections still saw the election of suspects in corruption and financial crimes as governors in some states ... Obviously, the proceed of crime is used by suspected politically exposed persons to purchase immunity from prosecution and delay the trial to escape public attention and possible justice.

A former Governor who was jailed for stealing 4.2 million Pounds Sterling received a state pardon, while the National Pension Commission’s Boss who’s 2.8 billion Naira loot was traced to a private bank by EFCC, was given a national award by president Buhari’s government.

Perhaps the most dramatic scandal of all was the embezzlement of monies earmarked for fighting insurgency during Presidents Goodluck Janathan’s and Muhammadu Buhari’s administrations, as indicated in Appendix 1. According to Yemi Osinbajo, Vice President of Nigeria under Buhari’s government, “Nigeria lost about \$15 billion to fraudulent and corrupt practices in security equipment spending during the administration of Goodluck Jonathan ... when you look at the sheer amount of money that have been embezzled, the sheer amount of money lost from any of these various cases of corruption, you will find that far too much has been lost ... is more than half of the current foreign reserves of the country, currently put at about \$27 billion” (Osinbajo, 2021).

The former Vice President did not just stop at mere lamentation. He vowed that the new government would ensure “anyone who is found to have been corrupt will not only dislodge the property they have stolen, but will also pay for it, in terms of sanctions of the law.” It, however, turned out that the game of scandals would continue unimpeded under a government which campaigned on the mantra of anti-corruption. It was reported that the military spent N397 billion on arms in 2015; N444 billion in 2016; N495 billion in 2017; N654 billion in 2018; and N669 billion in 2019. The monies were used to buy arms from thirteen different countries, even as the military was daily losing the war against insurgency.

Dozens of soldiers were reportedly refusing to fight in Maiduguri, Borno State, unless provided with better ammunitions. Daily Trust Newspaper reports that, “Soldiers from the Maimalari Barracks were directed to move in two separate teams to a location in Damboa and Gwoza towns, which had been taken by Boko Haram two weeks prior to that time, following the ambush of some troops. The two teams drove out of Maiduguri but stopped in the outskirts of the city and insisted they would not move an inch further until they were provided with adequate weapons to confront the insurgents.

The soldiers were only given guns and some ammunition, and even the armoured tank that they were supposed to go with was withdrawn, and that is why they refused to fight Boko Haram insurgents who had superior weapons.” In response, however, the army hierarchy warned these soldiers that,

“the punishment for mutiny was death sentence by firing squad.

The lack of political will to punish those that commit financial crimes, and thereby deny the citizenry their inalienable right to good life, is a clear violation of Section 13 of the Nigerian constitution 1999 (as amended), which imposes responsibility on government to conform to, observe and apply the provisions of Chapter 2 of the constitution, as mentioned earlier. As mentioned earlier, Section 15(5) imposes the responsibility on government to “abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power” in the country. Section 16(1) stipulates that government has a responsibility to “secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity.”

Section 16 (2) further provides that, “the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good”. Similarly, Articles 5 and 9 of the UN Convention against Corruption impose legal obligations on government to “ensure proper management of public affairs and public funds, including loans obtained by the country, and to promote sound and transparent administration of public affairs.” The UN Convention against Corruption and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, to which Nigeria is a state party, further obligate government to “effectively prevent and investigate allegations of corruption and mismanagement of public funds, including loans obtained by the country.” Specifically, Article 26 of the UN convention requires government to “ensure effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions, including criminal and non-criminal sanctions, in cases of grand corruption.”

A country that sent troops to defend

Liberia, Sudan etc. in their moment of crisis has not been able to win an internal war against insurgency for almost two decades; a country that used to send massive food aid to Niger republic and other regional countries now imports food; a nation that once boasted of Steel Rolling Mills in Jos, Katsina and Aladja in addition to the gigantic Ajaokuta Steel Company, now has none of that; a country that once boasted about having the most efficient Airlines and Railway system in Africa, now has only a semblance of Air and Rail transport system; and a cotton producing nation which had several Textile Companies in the 1980s and 1990s now imports textiles and textile products amounting to 279 billion naira (671.8 million U.S. dollars) annually.

Despite efforts by the Tinubu government at fighting corruption through summary dismissal of top officials found guilty of stealing public funds, there are strong indications that Nigeria is not going to win the battle against corruption soon. And that has far-reaching consequences for economic wellbeing and national security. Just take a look at some of the most recent revelations. The Federal Government, through Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) allegedly paid more than 900 million Naira to different private accounts in the last three months of 2023 alone. Some of the payments were said to have been made by the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Productivity Center, Office of the Accountant General, Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, the Budget Office and the Pension Transitional Arrangement Department. These expenditures are direct violations of Section 713 of the [Nigerian Civil Service Financial](#)

Regulation 2009. The Financial Regulation under reference states that, “Personal money shall in no circumstances be paid into a government bank account, nor shall any public money be paid into a private bank account. An officer who pays public money into a private account is deemed to have done so with fraudulent intention.”

In what appears to be the latest financial scandals, the sacked Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation Minister under president Tinubu, Dr. Betta Edu, and the former Governor of Central Bank, Godwin Emefiele, were alleged to have paid large sums of public money into private accounts (see Appendix 1). Dr. Edu reportedly approved a transfer of more than 585 million naira of public money into a personal account. The money was meant to cushion the most vulnerable citizens of the country against the harsh effects of fuel subsidy removal. Some thirty billion naira was reportedly recovered from Dr. Edu by the EFCC as at April, 2024 (High Land FM News, Jos). It’s awfully shocking then, how public officials have sold their conscience in the attempt to build personal empires that don’t last, and for which they’ll be severely punished in the next life.

Furthermore, the Special Investigator appointed by president Tinubu to probe the CBN, Jim Obazee, discovered 593 bank accounts located in the United States, United Kingdom and China in which the Emefiele-led CBN kept Nigerian funds without authorization by the Board and Investment Committee of the bank. Bisi Abidoye reports that the investigator also discovered how billions of naira were allegedly stolen by Mr Emefiele and other officials from the CBN’s accounts including a “fraudulent cash withdrawal of \$6.23 million” –

about N2.9 billion at the then official exchange rate of N461 to a dollar. Mr Obazee was said to have disclosed these findings in his report in which he recommended the prosecution of Mr Emefiele and at least 13 other individuals, including his deputy governors, for alleged gross financial offences. “In the UK alone,” he said, “my probe led me to 543.4 million Pounds kept by Mr Emefiele in fixed deposit accounts ... Mr Emefiele also manipulated the Naira exchange rate and perpetrated fraud in the e-Naira project of the CBN ... the highly controversial redesign of the Naira in October 2022 was neither recommended by the Board of the CBN nor approved by the then President, Muhammadu Buhari, contrary to the provisions of Section 19 (1) of the CBN Act, 2007”.

Nigerians are also waiting for the outcome of investigations into the alleged disappearance of a 3.4 billion dollar Emergency Loan Nigeria obtained from IMF in 2020, in order to fight the COVID-19 pandemic (see Appendix 1). According to the 2020 annual audited report by the Auditor-General of the Federation, the loan “may have been diverted or unaccounted for.” The most painful aspect of this scandal is that Nigeria would pay back the missing loan in five installments from 2023 to 2027. The first instalment, due in 2023, was worth 497.17 million dollars. The second instalment, due in 2024, will be worth 1.76 billion dollars. The third instalment, due in 2025, will be worth 865.27 million dollars. The final two instalments, due in 2026 and 2027, will each be worth 33.99 million dollars. These instalments will only be interest payments.

It is high time Government decided to kill corruption so that a permanent solution can be found for viable infrastructural

projects which were inaugurated in the 1970s and 80s but were later abandoned; or public service institutions that have become conduit pipes for siphoning public funds rather than deliver services to the public; or critical industries like the petrochemical, steel, textiles, pharmaceuticals which have folded up for decades; or federal roads that have become death traps due to non-maintenance; or the rising insurgency that has claimed, and continues to claim thousands of lives. It should be realized that the public service institution, everywhere in the world, exists primarily to facilitate enjoyment of good life for the citizenry. According to Sharma et al, "Public service is service in the cause of the nation ... people who join the public service do not anticipate becoming rich and famous. The majority of them feel a basic commitment to the values of public service ... one is reminded of the ancient Greek city-state where a citizen found a sense of fulfillment only in the service of the state, it was the city-state which made the good life possible".

The Contagiousness of Corruption

It is no longer news that a considerable number of political office holders in Nigeria are passionate about wealth accumulation, and about living extravagant lifestyles. A top political office holder recently told viewers in a television interview how he received one hundred million Naira loan from each of two banks, shortly after his election to the Federal House of Representatives. According to this law maker, the two banks offered him the loan while he was waiting to be inaugurated. He said the two banks offered him the loans unsolicited, and that they did so because they had confidence, he'd steal money to pay back within a few months. He also disclosed how another bank had printed a Check (in Nigeria, we call it Cheque)

Book for him during the same time, even though he had no Account with the said bank.

I also recall that a Senator once obtained a loan of five hundred million naira from a bank, contested election and lost. He went into coma for several months and later died. This goes to show clearly that financial institutions are deeply involved in the perpetuation of financial crimes in Nigeria. No public servant or political office holder can steal money in a cashless economy such as ours, without such monies passing through the banks. Experience shows that these banks hardly report suspicious transactions to anti-graft agencies, even when extant financial Regulations require them to do so. Truth is, corruption is deeply entrenched in Nigeria, and is made to look so attractive that it would be near impossible to discourage the ordinary civil or public servants from partaking in it. It is rather disturbing, though, that the individual and collective behavior of some of the political office holders have begun to impact negatively on the morale of members of the mainstream Civil or Public Service. People employed in the Service now tend to model their official behaviour after these 'masters' (political office holders).

Thus, it is now common to find in the Ministries, Departments and Agencies, a significant number of career civil or public servants whose body language tells you that they're working for themselves, rather than for the public. Hence, they falsify records, such as changing their date of birth; inflate contract fees; divert funds into their private accounts; avoid work; delay execution of projects unnecessarily; spend weeks and months without going to work or doing any tangible work; and compete among themselves in ownership

of multi million Naira cars or homes, as I will show shortly.

The challenges faced by the Service were succinctly summarized by a one-time Head of Service of the Federation, Mahmud Yayale Ahmed. I bring you his 2004 summation here, because of its relevance to current realities. He said:

“The Service is often perceived by many as corrupt, outdated in technology, lacking in professionalism and creativity, slow in responding to issues, and structurally weak.

If the theft of over \$3.6 billion (more than half of Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves of \$27 billion during the period) between 2011 and 2015 could deny Nigerians the benefit of 1,500 kilometers of road network, and around 500 schools, then we can imagine the opportunity cost of the 15 billion dollars stolen through arms deals between 2015 and 2019; the 21 trillion naira and 47.4 billion dollars allegedly stolen by eight former Ministers/Special Advisers, five Senators, and fourteen ex-Governors during a 15-year period, or the 3.4 billion dollars borrowed from the IMF by Buhari's government but which disappeared without a trace.

Thus corruption has made it extremely difficult for government to fulfill its primary and secondary obligations to the citizenry, in terms of provision of security and social amenities. This has further created the environment for social strife and economic disempowerment.

Implications for Leadership and Development Political Apathy, Disdain for Leadership

Corruption has created the conditions for a permanent disconnect between leaders and the followers. Again and again,

politicians behave in a manner that betrays their insensitivity, and the lack of empathy and inhumanity. As I write these lines, the national Assembly passed a Bill to change the nation's anthem, even as the people are grappling with high cost of living.

Furthermore, political consideration appears to have taken the center stage in decision making processes in all arms of the public service since 1999, with regard to recruitment, promotion and training. Contrary to stipulated guidelines, or verbal pronouncement by Chief Executives, it is common to find personnel being recruited, promoted or nominated for overseas training solely on the basis of political consideration, rather than job requirements.

This practice has given room for staff of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to give bribe, or indulge in similar malpractices as they jostle for available opportunities. The much talked about merit is thus sacrificed on the alters of favoritism and mediocrity. The practice has led to frustration among hundreds of thousands of otherwise hard-working staff, and is a key factor in poor service delivery in the public sector.

In the meantime, unemployment and poverty have continued to push hundreds of thousands of the youthful population into crime. The result is that, safety of life and property has now become a primary concern for individuals and communities, as they go to schools, farms, markets or other work places in constant panic. A typical example of this is Kogi State, where, for eight years, full salaries were not paid to civil servants by a former Governor who allegedly stole trillions from public treasury. Capital projects were also absent in the State under the Yahaya Bello-led administration, even as election rigging, intimidation, assassination and abduction of political

opponents and other innocent persons became the order of the day.

The ongoing general hardship in the country is a direct consequence of years of unbridled corruption and non-fulfillment of electoral promises. The general feeling is that, rather than serve public interest, governments in Nigeria have decided to use power to punish the people. The future is indeed bleak for Nigerians, even as experts estimate that the real impact of corruption would be felt from the year 2030.

Consequent upon the growing awareness among the populace that they're being punished by government, they have become disenchanted about democracy and governance. This is manifested through voter apathy during elections, as no more than 55% of registered voters were said to have participated in each of the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections, according to Premium Times. This is despite repeated appeals to the people by religious or community leaders, who may have received bribe from politicians to run such errands.

Another direct impact of corruption is the lack of proper funding for the mainstream public service, including payment of salaries and wages. As indicated earlier, the minimum wage of thirty thousand naira is no longer feasible in the face of hyper-inflation and failure of government to bring the prices of goods and services under control.

Abandoned Development Projects

The failure of the much-trusted government of Muhammadu Buhari to revive Refineries and Steel Rolling companies as promised during the 2015 electoral campaigns has also revealed how deep-seated corruption in Nigeria has become. All the trillions of naira spent on these and several other critical projects like Aviation and Defence went

down the drain and unaccounted for, leaving the citizens to wonder about the real meaning and purpose of democratic governance.

President Tinubu may have succeeded in removing fuel subsidy (upon which ordinary Nigerians depended for their day-to-day existence), but it does not appear that the people would ever have a sustainable taste of the promised social palliatives in years to come, even as inflation and foreign exchange rates keep soaring to high heavens.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has shown that official corruption has impacted negatively on Nigeria's political leadership and economic development. the following measures are recommended, for addressing the identified problems.

1. Looters of the economy should be subjected to exemplary punishment, no matter their status in society. This may include life jail term, as in Denmark, or amputation, as it's done in Saudi Arabia, depending on the amount involved. The so-called *Immunity Clause* in Nigeria's Constitution, which seeks to protect a sitting President, Governor or Law Maker from being prosecuted, should be removed, since it encourages people to steal as much as they can while in public office.
2. The judicial process should be fast tracked such that there are no delays in the trial of people suspected of grand looting. It is indeed sad to hear that corruption-related trials have been going on in Nigeria for almost two decades. All the

- pending cases of corruption should, therefore, be concluded within three months.
3. Nigeria's apex bank, CBN, should play a purely regulatory role in the economy, and stop retail banking, as this is the domain of commercial banks anywhere in the world. A central bank has no business buying and selling dollars, for instance. Commercial banks which colluded with public officials to steal the nation's wealth should be made to return the stolen wealth and then closed down, with their chief executives jailed. Also, the people behind all the subsidy scandals in the nation's history should be traced, arrested, made to return the proceeds of their loot and jailed.
 4. A wage system that takes account of inflationary trends should be paid to all categories of public servants. The present system whereby a staff on Grade Level Two receives a monthly net pay of thirty thousand naira (N30,000.00) is dehumanizing. Any officer who steals after wages have been so enhanced, should be dismissed, jailed or punished with amputation, depending on the seriousness of the crime.
 5. It is also recommended that government takes urgent steps to reduce the cost of governance, especially in regard to the law-making arm of government where each of the 109 members of the upper Legislative House is currently paid the sum of N250,000,000.00 per annum. The burden of a bi-camera legislature has been too heavy on the citizens, given Nigeria's obligations to IMF, the World Bank and other creditors. A uni-camera legislature can well do for our purpose, now or in the future. Monies realized from this measure should be channeled to health, education, job creation, agriculture and transport where the nation currently has abysmal deficits.
 6. Government should restore fuel subsidy without delay; in view of the unprecedented hardship its removal has caused the entire population; this is more so as it is now clear the payment of subsidies has been a scam all along. Government should also take a step further to punish NNPC officials and all those involved in fuel importation, after recovering looted funds from them. Nigerians are looking up to government for justice and fairness in this regard.
 7. A general appeal is also made here to all persons who had looted Nigeria's commonwealth at one time or another, to urgently commune with their inner conscience and voluntarily return the looted funds to government while they're still alive. It is expected that this will enable government restore some of the essential social services which corruption had denied the people over the years.

Appendix: Profile of Corruption Cases in Nigeria

Source: Newspaper Reports and Author’s Collections from other Media

S/N	Amount Stolen	Persons Involved	Amount Recovered & Possibly Re-looted	Status of Court Trial
1	N21 trillion, \$47.4 billion	Eight former Ministers/Special Advisers, five senators, and fourteen ex-Governors	Yet to be disclosed	Still on-going, after several years.
2	Unknown	Gen. Sani Abacha	9.01 billion pounds; 4.09 billion Swiss Franc; 800 million US dollars; 3.01 Deutschmark	-
3	Unknown	Alhaji Ismaila Gwarzo	1.0 billion pounds; 2.00 billion Swiss Franc; 1.3 billion dollar; 700 Deutschmark	-

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