CORRUPTION AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: TRENDS AND DYNAMICS

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the evolving manifestations of corruption in Nigeria and their direct contribution to the deepening insecurity across the country. It reveals that corruption has not only persisted since the return to democratic rule in 1999 but has also become intricately linked with various forms of insecurity, including banditry, kidnapping, cybercrime, terrorism, and human trafficking. The study establishes that corrupt practices often perpetuated by individuals in political and bureaucratic positions have emboldened criminal networks and weakened institutional responses to threats. Employing a qualitative content analysis of secondary data, the research identifies significant gaps in governance, accountability, and social inclusion as key enablers of both corruption and insecurity. Findings indicate that insecurity is widespread across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, with state failure and elite complicity exacerbating the crisis. The study recommends a multidimensional approach to reform, including strengthening institutional capacity, promoting democratic governance, engaging multi-stakeholder participation in national security, and investing in youth empowerment, civic education, and public service delivery. The paper concludes that only through sustained and inclusive efforts to combat corruption can Nigeria begin to reverse its prevailing insecurity and build a more stable and accountable political order.

Keywords: Corruption, Insecurity, Criminality, Weak Institutions, Governance, Nigeria

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1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Corruption remains a persistent and deeply entrenched issue that undermines governance, security, and development across the globe. In any society where corruption thrives, lawlessness becomes pervasive, eroding trust in public institutions and weakening the social fabric. This breakdown of order fosters an environment that is hostile to sustainable development and gives rise to multiple forms of insecurity, making life uncertain, impoverished, and unsafe.

In Nigeria, the past two decades have witnessed an alarming increase in the twin challenges of corruption and insecurity, manifesting in various complex and evolving patterns. Despite being endowed with legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms aimed at addressing these challenges, the country continues to grapple with their debilitating effects.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), under Chapter II, Section 2(b), clearly states that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. Furthermore, Section 15(5) mandates the state to abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power. In line with these constitutional provisions, successive governments have established various anti-corruption institutions such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) under the ICPC Act of 2000, and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) via the EFCC Act of 2004. Additional regulatory bodies include the Fiscal Responsibility Commission (Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2007), the Bureau for Public Procurement (Public Procurement Act, 2007), and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) established through the NEITI Act, 2007.

Despite these measures, corruption remains deeply rooted and continues to undermine national security, disrupt governance, and hinder socio-economic progress. The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the nexus between corruption and insecurity in contemporary Nigeria, with particular attention to the patterns, manifestations, and implications over the past two decades. The study seeks to assess how corruption has contributed to the breakdown of law and order, the erosion of state capacity, and the proliferation of various forms of insecurity, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and organized crime. Additionally, the study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional frameworks, such as the ICPC, EFCC, and other anti-corruption agencies, in addressing these challenges. By analyzing these interconnections, the study intends to offer practical recommendations for strengthening governance, enhancing institutional accountability, and promoting sustainable peace and development in Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Corruption

There are so many views and definitions by various scholars on corruption. However, this paper is adopting the following views. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2008) see corruption as the misuses of public power, office or authority for private benefit through bribery, extortion, influences, pedaling, nepotism, fraud or embezzlement. Meanwhile, Akinyemi (2010) posits that corruption can be better understood by identifying its constituent elements. These elements are bribery, trading in influence, graft and involvement in organized crimes. It also includes unholy alliance and what he called "quiet corruption" meaning citizens not receiving services for which public officials have been paid to deliver. However, this operational definition better explains corruption trends and dynamics in Nigeria. It is obvious corruption extends beyond to include financing and importation of unauthorized arms and ammunition for insurgent activities, unauthorized selling of military helicopters, procurement of old and outdated military equipment, and conniving with constructors or public officials to deliver sub-standard goods or services.

Corruption is commonly defined as the 'abuse of entrusted power for private gain' (Transparency International, 2023). It occurs when individuals or institutions violate ethical or legal standards for personal or group benefits, at the expense of the public good. Over the years, numerous Nigerian and international scholars have made significant contributions to the academic understanding of corruption in Nigeria.

2.1.2 Underlying Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption in Nigeria is a product of several interrelated structural, institutional, historical, and socio-cultural factors. Scholars have identified a range of underlying causes that explain the persistence and entrenchment of corrupt practices in the country.

1. Colonial Legacy and Weak Institutions

The roots of corruption in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial era, where the administrative system

prioritized resource extraction over institutional development and accountability. According to Ekeh (1975), the colonial structure created a dichotomy between the "civic" and "primordial" public spheres, fostering divided loyalties and weakening national consciousness. The post-colonial state inherited institutions that were ill-equipped to promote transparency, accountability, or service delivery.

2. Rentier State and Oil Dependency

Nigeria's heavy reliance on oil revenues has created what scholars call a rentier state—where government income comes primarily from natural resources rather than taxation. This disconnection between the state and its citizens diminishes accountability and fosters rent-seeking behavior among elites (Karl, 1997; Adibe, 2017). The control of oil wealth has become a central focus of political competition, often leading to elite capture, embezzlement, and patronage networks.

3. Political Clientelism and Prebendalism

The culture of **prebendal politics**, as described by Richard Joseph (1987), refers to the practice where public officials use state resources to reward loyal supporters, friends, and ethnic groups. This system of patronage undermines meritocracy and fosters corruption by institutionalizing favoritism and misuse of public office.

4. Weak Legal and Institutional Frameworks

The failure of anti-corruption agencies, the slow judicial process, and limited enforcement of laws contribute to a culture of impunity. Despite the establishment of bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the political will to prosecute high-profile cases remains inconsistent (Aiyede, 2006).

5. Socio-Cultural Norms and Ethnic Politics

Corruption is also reinforced by socio-cultural expectations, such as the obligation to share resources with one's extended family or ethnic group. In many cases, public officials are pressured to divert public funds to serve communal or ethnic interests (Smith, 2007). This communalist ethic often conflicts with modern notions of bureaucratic neutrality and national interest.

6. Poverty and Economic Insecurity

Pervasive poverty and unemployment in Nigeria create an environment in which both public officials and

ordinary citizens may engage in corrupt practices for survival. Igbuzor (2008) argues that low wages, inadequate incentives, and a high cost of living encourage civil servants to demand bribes and misuse office for personal gain.

2.3 High-Profile Corruption Cases in Nigeria (2020–2025): An Assessment of Systemic Challenges and Anti-Corruption Responses

Corruption in Nigeria remains a systemic problem undermining development, eroding public trust, and depleting state resources. Despite decades of anti-corruption campaigns led by agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), high-profile cases involving top government officials, ministers, and state governors continue to emerge. Between 2020 and 2025, an intensification of investigative reporting and judicial scrutiny has exposed deeply entrenched corruption networks across all tiers of governance. This paper presents a detailed analysis of some of the most prominent cases, using official data, secondary studies, and institutional reports to understand their scale, response, and implications for governance in Nigeria.

2.4 Empirical Review

The 2019 National Survey on Bribery and Corruption in Nigeria, conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), represents a significant contribution to anti-corruption research. The survey provides reliable, experience-based data on Nigerians' encounters with corruption across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. It broadens the scope of inquiry by addressing issues such as nepotism in recruitment and vote-buying, offering rich insights for policy formulation. Nonetheless, the study remains largely descriptive, lacking longitudinal trend analysis and failing to address systemic causes of corruption or issues of institutional accountability. Furthermore, its strong alignment with the government may undermine its objectivity, and it falls short in proposing concrete follow-up mechanisms or engaging civil society meaningfully. Therefore, while valuable, future studies are encouraged to adopt a more analytical and inclusive framework.

Nnonyelu, Uzoh, and Anigbogu (2013) offer a critical perspective on the pervasive influence of corruption and insecurity in Nigeria, asserting that these twin crises have seriously weakened governance and democratic consolidation. The authors argue that the rampant looting of public funds and rising violence are symptomatic of a deeper crisis rooted in societal value distortions. This misdiagnosis of Nigeria's governance challenges has rendered state interventions largely ineffective. The study advocates for a

fundamental reorientation of national values and a transformative shift in governance structures to address the root causes of insecurity and corruption.

In a related contribution, Jimoh (n.d.) emphasizes the socio-economic consequences of corruption and insecurity, arguing that these issues pose significant obstacles to national development. The study uniquely positions Social Studies as an educational tool capable of addressing these challenges by instilling moral values, critical thinking, and civic responsibility in learners. It concludes that the incorporation of Social Studies into national curricula is essential for shaping responsible citizens and fostering a corrupt-free, secure society.

The 2019 NBS Survey on Bribery and Corruption also underscores President Muhammadu Buhari's administration's continued anti-corruption stance since 2015. By collecting data from over 33,000 households, the survey investigates citizens' interactions with public officials, examining the prevalence of bribery and attitudes toward corruption. It expands its focus to include nepotism and vote-buying and offers disaggregated data by age, gender, and socio-economic status. The survey serves as both an evaluative tool for anti-corruption efforts and a strategic framework for future policy reforms.

Obazee (2023) offers a sophisticated analysis of how corruption deepens insecurity in Nigeria. Drawing on the works of Motola (2006) and Epele (2006), the study reveals how corruption undermines public institutions and security systems, thereby eroding public trust and fostering social discontent. The paper explores the manipulation of state security apparatuses and embezzlement of public funds as mechanisms through which corruption fuels insecurity. It concludes by calling for systemic reforms and a deeper understanding of the corruption-insecurity nexus to build a resilient and secure society.

Similarly, Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Okorie (2014) highlight how corruption and insecurity continue to obstruct Nigeria's development trajectory despite its human and natural resource potential. The study identifies corruption as a root cause of insecurity, noting its impact on institutional weakness, diversion of public funds, and promotion of grievance-based conflicts. It argues that without addressing corruption, efforts to resolve insecurity will remain futile. The authors advocate for prioritizing anti-corruption initiatives within national development agendas.

Adesina (2024) takes a broader approach by analyzing the evolving nature of insecurity in Nigeria since 1999, focusing on its root causes, impacts on human security, and possible solutions. Using a qualitative approach and theoretical frameworks such as elite theory and relative deprivation theory, the study captures the multidimensional nature of insecurity. It identifies threats across all six geopolitical zones—including kidnapping, Boko Haram insurgency, separatism, and farmer-herder conflicts—and recommends a composite model that views security as a collective responsibility. The paper also calls for good governance, democratic strengthening, improved security training, and strategic investment in sectors like agriculture, education, and health.

Finally, the 2024 Third Round of the Nigeria Corruption Survey, conducted by NBS and UNODC with support from international partners such as UK Aid and the MacArthur Foundation, builds upon previous surveys by incorporating technological and methodological innovations. Conducted during a government transition period, this round introduces tools like digital mapping and a Gender and Social Inclusion module, allowing for a more inclusive understanding of corruption's impacts on various demographic groups. The survey benefited from collaboration with MDAs, civil society organizations, and law enforcement agencies, reinforcing its legitimacy. Its findings are intended to guide targeted reforms, improve accountability, and empower citizens in the fight against corruption.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Anne Krueger's (1974) Rent-Seeking Theory of Corruption, as introduced in her seminal paper *"The Political Economy of the Rent-Seeking Society,"* explains how individuals or groups seek economic gain not through productive efforts, but by exploiting political or institutional systems for personal benefit. Rather than creating new wealth, rent-seekers use political influence to obtain favorable treatment, such as subsidies, tax breaks, or regulatory advantages, often through lobbying or bribery. These unproductive and expropriative activities benefit a few while imposing significant costs on society—manifesting in poverty, inequality, corruption, insecurity, lawlessness, and underdevelopment.

Krueger's theory emphasizes that rent-seeking distorts resource allocation, reduces competition, and undermines institutional integrity. The World Bank (1997) defines rent-seeking as the misuse of public or political office for private gain, while other scholars (Brumm, 1999; Cole & Chawdhry, 2002; Iqbal & Daly, 2014) highlight the self-serving motives of those who manipulate public policy without contributing to

economic growth. In the Nigerian context, rent-seeking is especially visible in the national security and defense sectors, where it undermines institutional effectiveness, inflates the cost of insecurity, and obstructs the acquisition of modern military equipment. These activities have long-term implications, weakening governance structures, impeding economic development, and compromising national security, all while reinforcing systemic political, military, and corporate corruption.

2.5.1 Manifestation of Corruption on Security

Widespread corruption in Nigeria has become deeply linked to the nation's rising insecurity. Recent data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2024) shows a staggering toll: over 614,000 Nigerians killed and more than 2.2 million kidnapped between May 2023 and April 2024, with N2.2 trillion paid in ransom. The unresolved questions about who funds these armed groups and how they acquire weapons continue to unsettle both the public and government. Violence has extended into rural areas, with the highest murder rates recorded in the North-West and North-East regions. A lack of trust in law enforcement—widely perceived as corrupt and ineffective—has discouraged crime reporting. Former Justice George Oguntade and other observers argue that the state has failed in its basic duty to protect citizens, breaking the social contract. Citizens now face threats from armed groups, insurgents, and even state security forces, all while living under policies that favor the elite. Political corruption fuels this crisis, with many leaders pursuing power without vision, governance philosophy, or accountability. Nigerian politics has become a self-serving enterprise, detached from public service, worsening insecurity and deepening public frustration.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of the relationship between corruption and insecurity in contemporary Nigeria. The choice of a qualitative approach is informed by the need to explore complex socio-political phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. The study relies exclusively on secondary sources of data, including scholarly articles, government reports, institutional publications, legal documents, official statistics, and credible media reports. These sources offer valuable insights into the patterns, trends, and consequences of corruption and insecurity, as well as the effectiveness of institutional responses over time.

To analyze the data, the study employs content analysis as its primary analytical tool. Content analysis allows for the systematic examination and interpretation of textual data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within the discourse on corruption and insecurity in Nigeria. Through this method, the study aims to draw meaningful conclusions about how corruption fuels insecurity and undermines national development, while also evaluating the roles and limitations of existing anti-corruption frameworks.

4.1 CONTENT ANALYSIS

Theme 1: Institutionalization of Corruption

Corruption is deeply embedded within Nigeria's public and governance systems. Empirical studies, including reports by UNODC and NBS, reveal that practices such as bribery, nepotism, and vote-buying have become normalized in interactions between citizens and public officials. The pervasiveness of these practices across all geopolitical zones indicates a systemic failure of integrity and accountability in state institutions. Although these reports offer valuable data, they are often criticized for their limited analytical depth and lack of civic engagement.

Theme 2: Symbiotic Relationship Between Corruption and Insecurity

There is a mutually reinforcing link between corruption and insecurity. Corruption weakens governance structures, distorts public resource allocation, and undermines law enforcement, thereby creating conditions conducive for insecurity such as insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping. Studies argue that insecurity flourishes in environments where public trust is low and institutions are compromised by elite manipulation and structural inequality.

Theme 3: Role of Societal Values and Civic Education

The erosion of moral values and civic responsibility contributes significantly to both corruption and insecurity. Literature emphasizes the importance of value reorientation and the role of Social Studies education in shaping ethical citizens. This theme points to the necessity of long-term, preventive strategies that include curriculum reforms and civic education to rebuild social norms and discourage corrupt practices.

Theme 4: Need for Inclusive and Multi-Stakeholder Approaches

Addressing corruption and insecurity requires collective action. Studies call for collaboration among

government institutions, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector. Successful anti-corruption strategies depend not only on enforcement and institutional reform but also on meaningful citizen participation, political will, and investment in socioeconomic development.

Theme 5: Weakness of Institutional Capacity and Governance

Several studies highlight the poor performance of institutions as a major barrier to fighting corruption and insecurity. Issues such as lack of accountability, selective justice, and politicized security agencies hinder effective response to corruption and criminality. Strengthening institutional capacity, enforcing the rule of law, and ensuring the independence of anti-corruption agencies are crucial to reversing the current trends.

4.2 Findings

1. Corruption is systemic and pervasive. Corruption affects virtually all sectors of Nigerian society, especially public service, governance, and law enforcement. Practices such as bribery, vote-buying, and nepotism have become normalized in both official and unofficial transactions.

2. Empirical data is often descriptive but lacks depth. National surveys (e.g., NBS/UNODC) provide valuable quantitative data on corruption prevalence. However, many of these studies fail to go beyond surface-level descriptions and often lack causal or in-depth analyses.

3. Corruption and insecurity are mutually reinforcing. Corruption undermines institutional effectiveness, weakens the rule of law, and facilitates insecurity. Armed conflicts, insurgency, and banditry often flourish in environments characterized by elite capture and misgovernance.

4. Weak governance and elite manipulation drive insecurity. Theories like Elite Theory and Relative Deprivation show that inequality, marginalization, and state failure fuel public resentment, leading to violence and instability.

5. Poor civic education and value erosion contribute to corruption and insecurity. A lack of value-based education and civic responsibility is identified as a root cause of both corruption and societal instability. Strengthening social and civic education could play a preventive role in addressing both issues.

6. Multi-stakeholder involvement is essential. Combating corruption and insecurity requires an inclusive

4.3 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from the content analysis, it is evident that corruption and insecurity are deeply intertwined challenges that continue to undermine Nigeria's development, governance, and social cohesion. Corruption remains pervasive across public institutions, weakening the rule of law, eroding public trust, and enabling the rise of insecurity through poor governance and elite manipulation. The lack of in-depth, causal research further limits the capacity to fully understand and address these complex issues. Additionally, poor civic values and weak institutions have contributed significantly to the entrenchment of both corruption and insecurity in Nigeria. Despite various interventions, meaningful progress requires a collective, multi-stakeholder approach that emphasizes inclusive governance, strong civic education, institutional reform, and targeted policy actions. Only through sustained and coordinated efforts can Nigeria hope to overcome these challenges and chart a path toward national stability, accountability, and sustainable development.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the reviewed empirical studies, the following recommendations are proposed to address the persistent issues of corruption and insecurity in Nigeria:

1. **Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Accountability**: The Nigerian government should enhance the autonomy, efficiency, and transparency of anti-corruption agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC. Regular audits, public asset declarations, and the use of technology in monitoring public expenditures should be enforced to reduce opportunities for corruption.

2. **Promote Civic Education and Moral Reorientation**: Educational institutions should be empowered to incorporate civic and social studies curricula that promote ethical behavior, national values, and public accountability. This will help instill a culture of integrity and patriotism among citizens from an early age.

3. **Adopt a Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Security**: Insecurity should not be left to security forces alone. The government should adopt a composite security model that involves local communities, traditional institutions, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and the private sector in intelligence gathering, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution.

4. **Improve Governance and Service Delivery**: Good governance remains central to combating both corruption and insecurity. Government at all levels must prioritize transparency, justice, equitable distribution of resources, and inclusive development to build public trust and legitimacy.

5. **Invest in Youth Empowerment and Job Creation**: Unemployment, especially among the youth, is a major driver of insecurity. The government should invest heavily in vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and job creation schemes to divert attention from criminal activities and foster economic inclusion.

6. **Support Evidence-Based Policy Making**: Regular national surveys and data collection efforts, such as the Nigeria Corruption Survey, should be institutionalized and integrated into policy planning to ensure that government interventions are targeted, measurable, and responsive to evolving realities.

7. **Promote National Dialogue and Reconciliation**: The government should initiate a national referendum or inclusive dialogue to address grievances fueling separatist agitations and regional tensions. This will help promote unity, peace, and a shared sense of nationhood.

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