

# Corruption as a Barrier to Effective Governance in Key Sectors of Nigeria

Ladi, Sule Matinja, PhD; Daniel, Hoshen Eugene, PhD; Abdulrahman Umar, PhD

Department of Sociology, University of Abuja, Abuja

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## ABSTRACT

Nigeria gained independence on October 1, 1960, and possesses valuable natural resources like fertile land, coal, natural gas, and crude oil, providing significant potential for rapid economic growth. Despite these resources and opportunities, Nigeria remains a developing and impoverished country. Recently, it ranked 145 out of 180 countries with a score of 25 on the corruption index. This paper examines how corruption has become a barrier to effective governance in key sectors of the Nigerian economy. The scope of this study spans from the year 2000 to 2023, a period marked by significant political transitions, democratic reforms, and intensified anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria. Within this timeframe, the study explores how corruption has adapted to changing political, economic, and technological contexts, revealing its resilience and complexity. A methodical review of qualitative content from secondary sources such as online materials, newspapers, and journal articles was conducted. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, a purposive sample size of 50 sources was selected for analysis. The study employs the theoretical framework of “Queer Ladder Theory” (QLT), which describes an unnatural ascent to high social status through corruption, including acts such as theft, bribery, and document falsification. The findings reveal that corruption in Nigeria undermines the effectiveness of public governance, negatively affecting political leaders, policymakers, and public servants. Corruption has led to injustice, economic inflation, increased internal security issues, and poor healthcare and education services, all of which negatively impact the welfare of citizens. Effective governance and corruption are closely linked, reinforcing each other in a harmful cycle; the lack of effective governance creates opportunities for various forms of corruption to thrive. To address the issues raised, the paper recommends reducing the cost of governance to improve the minimum wage, criminalizing undue interference with the justice system, and utilizing funds from the removal of fuel subsidies to establish and maintain refineries and rehabilitate road networks to support transportation and economic development.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Effective governance and the Nigerian Economy.

## INTRODUCTION

Every society defines specific actions that are strongly disapproved within families, social groups, and broader communities (Eghosa, 2015). Behaviours like lying, cheating, stealing, and spreading false accusations are widely regarded as deviant behaviors and not accepted. Those deviant behavioural actions out-rightly explain how corruption grew into more organized crimes in formal organizations. They carry moral, ethical, legal, and sometimes religious consequences because they undermine the core values of harmonious living and mutual respect for development in society. According to Onu (2023), corruption represents a significant issue in public and private organizations that is often manifested through unethical actions like document falsification, abuse of privileges, and lack of accountability. Such practices create an environment where transparency and trust are compromised, negatively impacting the efficiency and credibility of government institutions, agencies, and organizations (Smith, 2023; Adeola & Thompson, 2024).

Corruption remains a widespread issue, garnering significant attention from researchers and policymakers due to its detrimental effects on public services and societal governance (Zhang, 2023). Corruption is a reflection of weak governance structures and lack of accountability, ultimately hindering economic development, trust in institutions, and the equitable distribution of resources, and is found in developed and underdeveloped societies.

Even though the level of corruption varies depending on factors like legal frameworks, political stability, and the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures (Zhang, 2023). As a result, addressing this issue of corruption has become a central focus of international efforts to improve governance and foster sustainable development (Adebayo, 2024). African countries such as South Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria are known for experiencing high levels of corruption, with systemic issues affecting their political, economic, and social landscapes. However, corruption is not confined to less-developed societies; even developed societies like Denmark, Germany, and Sweden are also facing challenges related to corruption, though to a lesser extent (Luminous, 2024).

Corruption in Nigeria has deep historical roots, dating back to the colonial era (Uche, 2022). During British colonization, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was marked by dishonest trading practices and theft by British traders. These activities were often overlooked or even supported by colonial authorities, creating an environment where corruption was normalized. Nigerian workers, under colonial rule, were exposed to these unethical practices, and the misuse of the public treasury further fueled a culture of theft. This early exposure to corrupt activities set the stage for the widespread corruption that persists in Nigeria today, with corruption becoming embedded in the country's institutional frameworks (Carreras & Vera, 2018).

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria's rich natural resources, including oil, coal, natural gas, and fertile land, have had the potential to propel the country toward rapid economic growth. However, despite the valuable assets, Nigeria remains a developing nation struggling with poverty and economic instability (Adeola & Thompson, 2024). The persistent issue of corruption has prevented the country from fully harnessing its resources to improve the living conditions of its citizens. Corruption is deeply ingrained within Nigerian society, affecting everything from the daily transactions of ordinary citizens to the policies and decisions made by top political leaders (Drapalova, 2019). The effects of corruption in Nigeria are far-reaching, often diverting public funds intended for infrastructure, education, and healthcare, which could improve the nation's overall development. Despite numerous attempts to tackle corruption through legal reforms and anti-corruption agencies, progress has been slow and abortive (Onu, 2023).

In 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, revealed that public officials in Nigeria accepted bribes totaling N721 billion (\$1.26 billion). This staggering figure illustrates the extent to which corruption permeates the country's political and administrative structures, contributing to inefficiency and lack of accountability in governance (Sahara Reporters, 2024). The consequences of corruption are far-reaching, preventing efforts to achieve sustainable development and exacerbating poverty and inequality. Effective governance, which entails transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to public needs, is essential for improving the living standards of Nigerians. However, corruption undermines these principles, making it challenging to implement policies that can foster long-term progress. As the 2023 report suggests, the challenge of corruption remains a major barrier to achieving good and effective governance in Nigeria, demanding urgent attention and reform to ensure a better future for its citizens (Adebayo, 2024).

Against this background, this paper aims to explore how corruption become a barrier to effective governance in key Nigerian sectors from 2000-2023, which affects civil and public servant welfare, education, healthcare delivery, security, the economy, and the justice administration. Data for this paper are collected through a systematic qualitative review of secondary sources, such as online resources, newspapers, and journal articles. The paper is structured into seven sections, examining how corruption becomes a barrier to effective governance across various sectors of Nigerian economy. Accordingly, the sections of the paper are objectively structured as follows:

- i. Conceptual Definitions
- ii. Principles of Effective Governance
- iii. Theoretical Framework
- iv. Nigeria's Corruption Index

- v. Causes of Corruption in Nigeria
- vi. Effects of Corruption on Effective Governance in Nigeria
- vii. Conclusions/Recommendations

## Conceptual Framework

**Corruption:** Corruptions vary among writers and commentators, yet there is a broad consensus on key elements that define the concept. This variation in definitions is partly because corruption has attracted significant attention in both public discourse and academic research, leading to distinctive perspectives that enrich human understanding. Essentially, most definitions emphasize the abuse of authority for personal benefit.

Corruption, as defined by Drapalova (2019), Transparency International, and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, centers on the misuse of public power or authority for personal gain, often resulting in detrimental consequences for governance, social equity, and economic development. These definitions provide a foundational lens for understanding corruption not merely as individual misconduct but as a systemic issue that undermines trust, transparency, and institutional integrity. This conceptual framework positions corruption as a multidimensional phenomenon involving institutional abuse, socio-political dysfunction, and weakened accountability. It draws attention to both the overt and covert forms of corruption including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and policy manipulation while emphasizing their persistent relevance in modern governance structures. The continual misappropriation of public funds, such as the large-scale financial scandals documented by David and Akhakpe (2021), underscores how deeply entrenched corrupt practices remain, despite evolving anti-corruption mechanisms.

The scope of this study spans from the year 2000 to 2023, a period marked by significant political transitions, democratic reforms, and intensified anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria. Within this timeframe, the study explores how corruption has adapted to changing political, economic, and technological contexts, revealing its resilience and complexity. The focus will be on major public institutions, anti-corruption agencies, and policy frameworks, analyzing the nature and consequences of corruption in sectors such as public procurement, electoral processes, and law enforcement. The framework also considers the broader societal impacts such as public disillusionment, weakened rule of law, and developmental setbacks thereby offering a comprehensive approach to understanding corruption's long-term implications. This period allows for an in-depth assessment of progress, stagnation, or regression in the fight against corruption, informing more effective governance and policy strategies.

## Types of Corruptions:

Corruption takes various forms, each with distinct characteristics but collectively damaging the integrity and functioning of effective governance (Onu, 2023). These forms of corruption include bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favoritism, nepotism, and systemic corruption. In Nigeria, the prevalence of these corrupt practices has significantly hindered national development, affecting areas such as governance, public services, and economic stability (Carreras & Vera, 2018).

**Bribery:** Bribery involves offering money or other incentives to persuade someone to act illegally or unethically, thereby providing an unfair advantage. This practice disrupts the decision-making process by influencing individuals to act against their responsibilities, thereby compromising integrity and fairness. In Nigeria, bribery is widespread across various sectors, including law enforcement, where it affects the judicial system and public trust (Smith, 2020).

**Fraud:** is the act of deliberately deceiving others to secure an unfair or illegal benefit. It encompasses activities like counterfeiting, document falsification, and fraudulent schemes. In Nigeria, fraudulent practices, especially in the financial sector, have been a persistent issue, with schemes such as '419' advance-fee frauds becoming visible both nationally and internationally (Jones, 2021).

**Embezzlement:** this refers to the misappropriation of public funds by officials entrusted with managing these resources. In Nigeria, embezzlement is particularly common, where public officials divert funds allocated for state projects into personal accounts. This form of corruption has led to significant developmental setbacks, as funds intended for infrastructure, healthcare, and education are siphoned off, thereby affecting public welfare (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2022).

**Extortion:** it involves obtaining money or resources through threats, coercion, or violence, often perpetrated by government officials. In Nigeria, extortion is commonly observed among uniformed officers and local administrative authorities, who exploit their positions to extract funds from individuals or businesses. This practice is often justified under the guise of revenue generation or facilitating services, but it disproportionately affects low-income earners and small businesses (Williams, 2019).

**Favoritism and Nepotism:** this is a biased distribution of resources or opportunities based on personal connections rather than merit. In Nigeria, this often manifests in the allocation of government contracts, employment opportunities, and access to state resources, where individuals related to or connected with those in authority receive preferential treatment, which undermines the principles of fairness and meritocracy, leading to inefficiency and public resentment (Brown, 2018).

**Systemic Corruption:** this occurs when corrupt practices become embedded within an institution's normal operations. This is evident in Nigeria, where low wages and inadequate salaries have led to a normalization of bribery and other corrupt practices among public officials as a means to supplement their income. Systemic corruption creates a culture of dishonesty and weakens the integrity of public institutions, leading to compromised service delivery and reduced public trust (Taylor, 2021).

### **Effective Governance:**

Akpor & Olorunfemi, (2023) define effective governance as the efficient use of political authority, societal control, and resource management to support social and economic development. Their concept emphasizes multiple facets, including the functionality of a state's institutions, structural frameworks, decision-making processes, and the establishment and execution of policies. Effective governance, therefore, involves strategically distributing and utilizing power and resources in ways that benefit citizens, promote societal well-being, and support sustainable progress (Drapalova, 2019).

Government demonstrates effective governance by honoring the social contract with its citizens, upholding democratic values like accountability and transparency. This involves not only responding to public needs but also formulating and enforcing policies and laws that address critical societal challenges. In this context, effective governance is also gauged by the public's perception of the government as accountable, lawful, secure, and capable of maintaining order. Commitment to these principles enhances citizens' quality of life by ensuring access to essential services and sustaining societal stability (Christopher & Abe, 2013).

### **Principles of Effective Governance:**

Research consistently shows that effective governance is essential for enhancing citizen happiness and well-being. This connection arises directly, by strengthening the relationship between government and citizens, and indirectly, by raising living standards (Krishnan, 2020). Effective governance is strongly aligned with anti-corruption efforts, which also positively affect well-being by promoting fair and transparent practices. In Nigeria, where corruption has historically posed a challenge to development, fostering effective governance principles has become crucial. For instance, initiatives to reduce corruption in public procurement need improvement for resource allocation in critical sectors like health and education (David & Akhakpe, 2021). Key principles of effective governance includes:

**Participation:** it is an active involvement of all citizens in decisions affecting their lives. Effective governance fosters environments where information flows freely and transparently, allowing people to express their opinions without fear of retaliation. The introduction of participatory budgeting in local governments will enable communities to have a say on how resources are allocated, improving trust and satisfaction among citizens. By

promoting inclusiveness, the government ensures that decision-making processes are representative and fair, helping to bridge the gap between government actions and citizen expectations (David & Akhakpe, 2021).

**Responsiveness:** this is the ability and readiness of government institutions to meet the needs and interests of all citizens. This includes addressing issues of gender, ethnic diversity, and representation for all social groups. Decentralization efforts will allow governments to address specific community needs more directly, enhancing the responsiveness of services. For instance, local healthcare initiatives tailored to underserved communities help address health disparities and boost overall well-being (David & Akhakpe, 2021).

**Efficiency and efficacy of resource:** Effective governance ensures the efficient use of resources to fulfill societal needs. This includes reducing unnecessary processes, streamlining services, and leveraging technology to improve public service delivery. In Nigeria, the digitalization of government services has helped reduce bureaucratic delays, especially in areas like business registration and tax collection. By improving operational efficiency and focusing resources on priority areas, the government can enhance service delivery and public satisfaction (Krishnan, 2020).

**Equity and Inclusivity:** this guarantee that all members of society, especially vulnerable groups, are considered in policy decisions. Effective governance focuses on alleviating poverty and reducing marginalization by promoting policies that provide equal access to essential services. In Nigeria, programs such as subsidized housing for low-income earners and free basic healthcare for the elderly and children have aimed to address social inequalities, making government services more accessible to disadvantaged groups (Smith, 2018).

**Accountability:** Accountability ensures that government officials are answerable for their actions, especially those that impact public welfare. This involves a commitment to transparency and responsiveness. In Nigeria, civil society organizations and the media play critical roles in holding leaders accountable, especially through investigative journalism and public forums. Effective accountability mechanisms require the active participation of civil society, interest groups, opposition parties, and the press to ensure that leaders adhere to their duties and act in the public's best interest (Brown, 2021)..

### **Theoretical Framework: Queer Ladder Theory (QLT)**

The "Queer Ladder Theory" (QLT) founded by American sociologist Daniel Bell, provides a framework for understanding how individuals use organized crime to gain wealth and improve their social status. Bell's metaphor of "queer ladder" illustrates the way certain people view organized crime as a necessary, albeit unconventional, path to climb the social hierarchy (Bell, 1973). This perspective is particularly relevant in societies with limited legal and economic opportunities, where individuals feel that the only way to advance is through criminal activities. For example, in Nigeria, economic constraints and societal inequalities often push individuals toward unconventional means of earning, including crime. Akogwu, Ezech, Sunday & Yildom (2023) highlight this phenomenon as central to QLT, where crime becomes not just a survival tactic but also a method of social mobility.

In the Nigerian context, QLT helps to explain how corruption often thrives as a form of organized crime, especially where government institutions lack the strength to enforce laws or curtail corrupt practices. Public officials and elites may exploit this weakness to engage in illegal activities without fear of punishment, taking advantage of a system that does not hold them accountable. This aligns with the QLT concept, as those who engage in corruption often do so with the belief that these acts will facilitate their advancement within social or economic circles (Eghosa, 2015).

QLT also emphasizes how economic challenges and instability drive individuals, especially government employees with limited welfare provisions, to engage in illegal activities to meet their financial needs. For instance, Nigerian workers sometimes engage in practices like job racketeering, contract inflation, or embezzlement as a means of supplementing their incomes in an environment with inadequate wages and limited job security (Musa, 2019). Those practices represent the "ladder" aspects of QLT with criminal activities providing an alternative means for individuals to climb the socioeconomic ladder though through dubious

avenues like bribery and document falsification (Taylor, 2021).

In a highly competitive political landscape, some individuals resort to such methods to gain political power or maintain their influence. These acts, though illegal often go unchecked in environments where governance is weak and accountability systems are limited (Onyema, 2018). By incorporating these examples, QLT provides a sociological perspective on organized crime, showcasing how, in Nigeria and similar environments, individuals perceive crime not only as a means of survival but as a viable path toward upward social mobility.

### **Nigeria's Corruption Index**

Since 2000, Nigeria has made efforts to combat corruption with significant initiatives under President Olusegun Obasanjo. The Obasanjo administration identified corruption as a major threat to Nigeria's progress, describing it as a "hydra-headed" monster due to its pervasive and complex nature. In response, Obasanjo's government established the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). These agencies are tasked with the responsibility of investigating corruption, recovering stolen public funds, and prosecuting offenders. Their establishment marked a pivotal step in Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts and demonstrated a political commitment in curbing the misuse of public resources (Onyeji, 2003). Despite the early efforts, corruption remains a major issue in Nigeria, as reflected in the nation's consistently low rankings on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

The CPI evaluates perceptions of corruption in the public sector, aggregating data from expert assessments and opinion polls that measure factors such as bribery, procurement irregularities, and the misuse of public funds. Over the years, Nigeria has struggled to improve its CPI score, frequently ranking among the world's most corrupt nations. This high level of perceived corruption highlights the challenges the country faces in enhancing accountability, transparency, and governance (Transparency International, 2023).

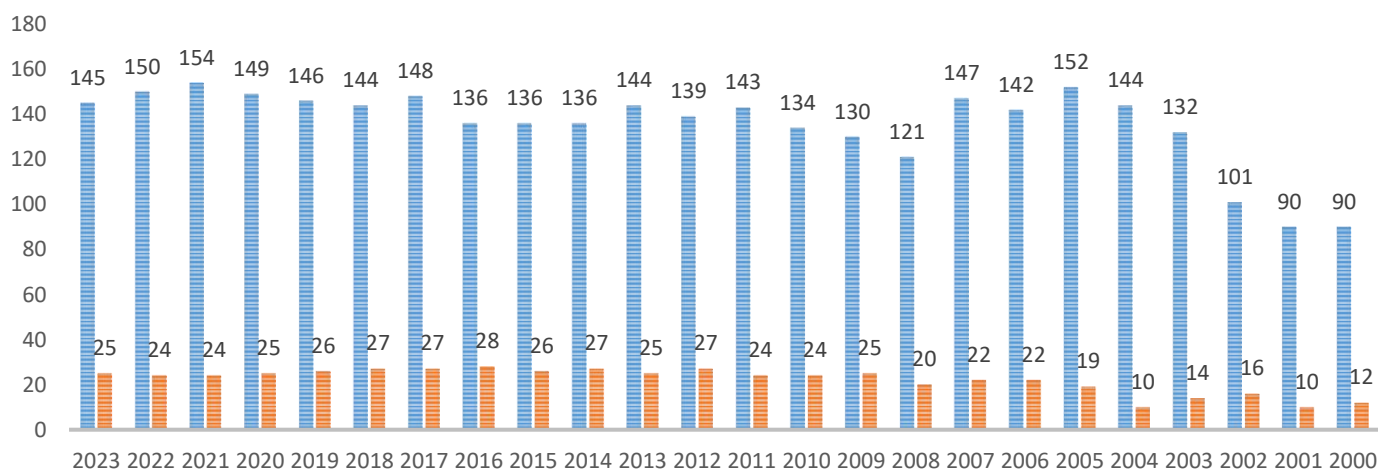
The persistence of corruption in Nigeria can be linked to systemic issues such as inadequate public administration, security challenges, and flawed electoral processes. For example, public procurement is often marred by inflated costs and resource wastage. The 2019 and 2023 general elections, for instance, saw reports of vote-buying and electoral fraud, which have undermined public confidence in the democratic process despite billions of Naira allocated for the conduct of the election; this has reinforced perceptions of corruption in the country (Akinlabi, 2020). These issues suggest that while anti-corruption institutions exist, structural weaknesses within the political and administrative systems hinder their effectiveness. This has contributed to the growth of fraudulent practices among public officials and civil servants who are hit hardest with low wages and inadequate welfare provisions. Therefore, they incentivize corrupt activities to supplement income. For instance, cases of job racketeering in the civil service highlight how economic pressures and limited job opportunities push individuals to exploit their positions for personal gain (Adebayo, 2019).

As the EFCC and ICPC continue their efforts, achieving sustainable progress against corruption in Nigeria requires a holistic approach that addresses both institutional weaknesses and economic inequalities. Reforming electoral processes, enhancing public sector accountability, and ensuring fair remuneration for public officials are crucial steps toward reducing corruption. In addition, public education campaigns to raise awareness about the consequences of corruption could foster a stronger anti-corruption culture. Without tackling these root issues, Nigeria's position on the Corruption Perceptions Index is unlikely to improve significantly, and the country will continue to face obstacles to sustainable development and good governance (Ajaero, 2022; Transparency International, 2023).

The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (TICPI) is a yearly ranking that has been published since 1995. It measures how people view corruption in the public sector across different countries. The scores come from trusted sources like corporate opinion polls, expert reviews, and surveys by organizations such as the World Bank, African Development Bank, and others. These sources collect views on issues like bribery, misuse of public power, and how well governments fight corruption. Over time, the TICPI improved its method to make the scores more accurate and clear. It remains an important guide for leaders, researchers, and groups who want to improve government performance and reduce corruption.

## SYNOPSIS OF NIGERIA'S GLOBAL CORRUPTION INDEX:2000 TO 2023

Rank/Position Score



### TICPI 2000-2023, Assessments Corporate Opinion Polls

The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) provides a global ranking of perceived corruption levels within the public sectors of various countries, using a scale from 0 to 100. In this index, 100 signifies a clean and transparent governance system, while a score closer to 0 indicates severe corruption. Over the past two decades, Nigeria's position on this index has consistently remained low, demonstrating persistent challenges in combating corruption. This trend highlights Nigeria's struggles with transparency and accountability despite efforts to implement reforms. The CPI data not only serves as a critical reference for understanding the state of governance but also emphasizes the need for more effective anti-corruption policies (Transparency International, 2023).

In 2023, Nigeria was ranked 145 out of 180 countries, with a CPI score of 25. Although this marks a marginal increase from 24 points in 2021 and 2022, the score remains significantly low, indicating that corruption remains a major issue. Reports from sources such as Sahara Reporters have highlighted how public officials, including judges and law enforcement officers, often receive large sums in bribes. For example, allegations of \$1.26 billion in bribes paid to various officials underscore the extent of corruption in Nigeria's public sector. Such cases reflect the systemic nature of corruption, where bribery has become normalized in various government and law enforcement institutions (Sahara Reporters, 2023). This deeply entrenched corruption creates significant barriers to Nigeria's progress in areas like economic development, foreign investment, and public trust in governance (Brown, 2021).

Despite having anti-corruption institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Nigeria is yet to achieve a CPI score above the midpoint of 50. A score of 50, which should have indicated moderate control over corruption, but Nigeria's low scores show that these institutions alone are insufficient and inefficient to fight corrupt practices. Nigeria's consistently low ranking is the reflection of structural weaknesses, limited enforcement of anti-corruption laws, and ongoing challenges in establishing integrity within the public sector. For a country with rich natural resources, still experiencing failures to curb corruption symbolizes a critical need for comprehensive reforms (Uche, 2022).

### Factors Contributing to Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption is deeply rooted in the relationship between governing authorities and the governed, often shaped by decision-making processes and the delivery of public services. The causes of corruption are diverse and vary significantly from one region to another. In Nigeria, several critical factors contribute to the persistence of corruption that hampers her progress and development (Brown, 2021).

**High Cost of Governance:** The immense costs involved in managing the activities of the government, such as extacodes or traveling allowances, the number of allocated official vehicles, and securities, are drivers of corruption in Nigeria. These high expenses perpetuate income inequality and poverty in the country. While Nigeria is rich in oil resources, the wealth generated from these resources tends to benefit a small elite, leaving the majority of the population in poverty. The excessive pay and allowances of politicians, who are among the highest-paid globally, continue to deepen this disparity, which has made public officials vulnerable to exploiting their positions for personal gain, leading to the misuse of public funds and resources (Akpore & Olorunfemi, 2023).

**Favoritism and Nepotism:** Another significant contributor to corruption in Nigeria is the widespread practice of favoritism and nepotism. These forms of corruption involve the use of public office to favour family members, friends, or political allies, particularly in the awards of jobs, contracts, or government appointments. Rather than focusing on merit and competence, it is personal connections that are resulting in the appointment of unqualified individuals to important positions (Akogwu, Ezech, Sunday, & Yildom, 2023). This not only undermines the effectiveness of governance but also perpetuates an environment where the well-being of the general public is secondary to the interests of the few. For example, in some cases, government contracts are awarded to businesses owned by relatives of high-ranking officials, leading to substandard services or projects. The widespread nature of these practices has led to a feeling that opportunities are reserved for those with connections rather than those with the right skills and qualifications (David & Akhakpe, 2021).

**Election Malpractices:** Corruption in Nigeria is also perpetuated through electoral malpractices. INEC received N313.4 billion from Nigeria's Federal Government for the 2023 General Election (<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2024/02/25/>). Despite collecting such an amount of money, the election was marked with many irregularities arising from failure to transmit live results, over-voting, and vote buying. The illegal activities distort the democratic process by undermining the integrity of elections, including vote manipulation and suppression of votes cast. Political actors engage in tactics like ballot-box stuffing, rigging of results, and intimidation of voters to ensure that their preferred candidates win. In some cases, election results are altered behind the scenes, with those responsible for such malpractices being offered bribes or incentives to keep quiet. Such actions undermine the very foundation of democracy, which has made citizens lose faith in the electoral process. The impact of corruption on the electoral process has been a link for producing corrupt and fraudulent leaders (Friday, Leke, & Adebayo, 2023).

**Income Inequality:** Despite Nigeria's vast oil wealth, income inequality remains a major issue. The country's oil resources generate immense wealth, yet the benefits of this wealth are not equally shared. A significant portion of the population continues to live in poverty, while a small group of politicians, elites, and business owners enjoy disproportionate wealth and privileges (Akpore & Olorunfemi, 2023). This stark contrast fuels resentment and corruptible practices. Public officials, seeing the widening gap between themselves and the masses, engage in more corrupt practices as a means to secure their wealth and maintain their status. Corruption thus becomes a tool for survival and power consolidation, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and inequality. This unequal distribution of wealth not only hinders social mobility but also prevents economic growth by limiting access to opportunities for the majority of the population (Akpore & Olorunfemi, 2023).

**Judicial Interference:** Judicial interference in Nigeria is a key factor that undermines the rule of law and perpetuates corruption. Political influence over the judiciary compromises its independence and impartiality. In many instances, political leaders appoint judges and other judicial personnel based on loyalty rather than competence, which distorts justice. When judges are chosen based on political connections, there is a higher likelihood that they will favour the interests of their benefactors over the interests of justice. This type of political interference undermines the judiciary's ability to uphold the law fairly and consistently, making it difficult for citizens to trust the legal system. The result is a legal system where political and financial pressures often dictate the outcomes of cases, particularly in high-profile corruption trials or disputes involving powerful individuals. This has led to a perception of a justice system that is selective and not truly impartial, where the powerful are often able to manipulate legal outcomes for their benefit (Smith, 2022). For example, former governors such as Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State, who was convicted in 2019 for N7.65 billion fraud but later had his conviction nullified on technical grounds, and Joshua Dariye of Plateau State and Jolly Nyame of Taraba State, both convicted for corruption and later granted presidential pardon in 2022, highlight this trend. Similarly, former

Minister of Petroleum Diezani Alison-Madueke, accused of massive financial crimes, remains at large despite numerous charges filed against her. These cases, among others, have fueled public perception that Nigeria's justice system often shields the elite from full accountability while ordinary citizens face harsher consequences.

**Godfatherism:** Godfatherism is a pervasive practice in Nigerian politics, where a powerful individual, or "godfather," uses influence and wealth to support a political candidate in exchange for loyalty and control over political decisions. This system allows godfathers to exert significant influence over government policies and appointments, often bypassing merit and fairness. Once the candidate they support gains power, the godfather make financial demands, secure government contracts, or obtain other forms of personal gain from the incumbent (Christopher & Abe, 2013). The godfather's role in politics often reinforces corruption and abuse of power, as they have the ability to manipulate elected officials to serve their interests rather than those of the public. This creates a political system where public office is seen as a means to personal enrichment, rather than an opportunity to serve the people. As a result, policies that could benefit the wider population are often sidelined in favour of those that maintain the godfather's influence, deepening the culture of impunity and political manipulation (Brown, 2021).

**Greed:** this is an insatiable desire for wealth and power beyond what is necessary for personal well-being, is a key driver of corruption in Nigeria, which has seen fit to maintain itself as a passive barrier to effective governance. When individuals, particularly those in positions of power, become fixated on amassing wealth for themselves, they are more likely to engage in unethical practices. These include theft, looting, graft, money laundering, and other forms of financial misconduct. A notable example where a former governor faced allegations of misusing government funds for personal expenses. The unchecked accumulation of wealth by public officials often comes at the expense of public resources meant to benefit the broader population. In Nigeria, several high-profile political figures have been implicated in large-scale corruption scandals that diverted public funds for personal gain. For instance, former Delta State governor James Ibori was convicted in the United Kingdom in 2012 for laundering over \$77 million in stolen public funds (BBC News, 2012). Similarly, former Abia State governor Orji Uzor Kalu was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment in 2019 for embezzling N7.65 billion from the state's treasury during his tenure, though his conviction was later overturned on procedural grounds (Premium Times, 2020). Diezani Alison-Madueke, Nigeria's former Minister of Petroleum Resources, has been accused of misappropriating billions of dollars while in office, with multiple asset seizures linked to her ongoing investigations (EFCC, 2021). These examples highlight how the wealth amassed by a few elites through corrupt practices deprives ordinary Nigerians of critical infrastructure, healthcare, education, and social services, reinforcing inequality and public distrust in governance. Such acts of greed are not only morally wrong but also undermine the effectiveness of governance, as public officials prioritize personal gain over the welfare of the people they are meant to serve. Greed fosters an environment where corruption becomes normalized, and those in power feel entitled to divert state resources to meet their insatiable desires (Sahara Reporters, 2024).

**Moral Decadence:** the decline of ethical standards is another significant factor that contributes to corruption in Nigeria. When societal values deteriorate, individuals become more inclined to engage in unethical or dishonest behaviors, often without fear of repercussions. This erosion of moral integrity is evident in aspects of Nigerian politics and governance. A striking example of this is the alleged budget padding scandal involving Senator Ningi, which revealed issues such as lack of transparency, abuse of authority, and conflict of interest. Budget padding, where government officials inflate budget proposals for personal gain, reflects a broader moral crisis within the political system. This behaviour not only deprives the public of essential services but also perpetuates a culture of dishonesty and impunity within government institutions. The decline in moral standards is evident in the way political leaders and public servants often prioritize personal or partisan interests over the public good (Sahara Reporters, 2024).

## DISCUSSIONS

### Corruption as a Barrier to Effective Governance in Nigeria.

Corruption is a major factor that suppresses Nigeria's potential for progress and development. Despite the nation's vast human and natural resources, corruption, particularly within the political system, has hindered

effective governance and prevented the proper allocation and utilization of resources. This widespread corruption affects critical sectors such as public service, education, justice system, healthcare, security, and the economy, making it difficult for the country to fully realize its developmental goals.

### **Effects of Corruption on Civil and Public in Servants:**

Civil and public servants include essential government workers in various ministries, parastatals, and agencies, whose work directly impacts the daily lives of citizens. They play crucial roles in the smooth functioning of government policies through implementations. However, many of these civil and public servants face systemic challenges, particularly low salaries, slow promotions, and inadequate welfare packages, which often push them toward corrupt practices as a means of supplementing their meager income (Ronald, 2023).

The disparity between the high salaries of politicians and the low wages of government workers is a significant factor contributing to corruption in Nigeria. As highlighted by Carreras & Vera (2018), this imbalance exacerbates the temptation for government workers to seek alternative sources of income through unethical means. For example, a Level 9 federal government employee in Nigeria earns approximately ₦168,000 monthly, but their expenses, especially in urban areas like Abuja, often exceed their earnings. Due to the high cost of living, many of these government workers in Abuja are forced to reside in more affordable areas such as Mararaba and Kuje, which are located on the outskirts of the city. These workers often face severe financial strain, leading them to resort to corruption as a way to meet their needs and maintain their livelihoods (Eze, 2024).

The insufficient compensation provided to government employees is a key factor contributing to the rise of corrupt practices. Public servants, including police officers, teachers, doctors, and other essential workers, are left with little choice but to accept bribes, engage in embezzlement, or misuse their positions to make ends meet. This not only harms the individual integrity of the public sector but also undermines the credibility of government institutions (Transparency International, 2023).

The growing discontent among Nigeria's public servants is also reflected in calls for better wages. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has advocated for a minimum wage increase to ₦250,000, highlighting the increasing financial pressures faced by workers in the public sector (Eze, 2024). The stark contrast between the generous salaries and benefits enjoyed by political officeholders and the financial struggles of ordinary public servants fuels resentment and exacerbates corruption. Political leaders continue to receive disproportionately high salaries, benefits, and allowances, further deepening the gulf between the elites and the working class. This wage inequality contributes to a vicious cycle, where public servants, feeling underpaid and undervalued, turn to corrupt practices to bridge the financial gap. These practices, in turn, perpetuate systemic corruption, undermining effective governance and hindering national development (Adojo & Daniel, 2020).

### **Effects of Corruption on Educational System in Nigeria**

Education plays a fundamental role in the development of any nation, and Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004) emphasizes its importance as a critical driver of national progress. However, corruption within Nigeria's educational system has resulted in numerous challenges that hinder its effectiveness, including the deterioration of infrastructure, understaffing, and declining academic standards (Adojo & Daniel, 2020).

Corruption in Nigeria's educational sector has stagnated progress and undermined the quality of education provided to students. A report by Daybreak (2023) highlights how corruption has contributed to the severe lack of essential resources in public schools, particularly in rural areas. Basic necessities such as desks, chairs, books, and even classrooms are often in short supply, leaving students in overcrowded and poorly equipped learning environments. This neglect is particularly evident in public primary and secondary schools, where teachers are often forced to work in substandard conditions with limited instructional materials. As a result, the overall quality of education suffers, and students are left without the proper resources to excel academically (Eghosa, 2015). The misappropriation of education funds has significantly hindered the development of the sector, with millions of students directly affected by the consequences of underfunding and poor infrastructure. Over the years, billions of naira allocated to improve educational facilities have either been diverted or misused. For instance,

in 2018, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) reported that N16.7 billion meant for constituency projects, many related to education, was either poorly executed or completely abandoned (ICPC, 2019). In 2013, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) accused several institutions and state governments of diverting allocated funds, with some projects left uncompleted despite full disbursement (TETFund, 2013). A notable case was in Benue State, where in 2018, the state government was accused of misappropriating part of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) grant of N7.6 billion, resulting in a backlog of uncompleted schools and overcrowded classrooms (Premium Times, 2018). According to UNICEF (2021), about 10.5 million Nigerian children are out of school, the highest globally, with lack of infrastructure and resources being among the major causes. These examples demonstrate how corruption and fund mismanagement continue to undermine access to quality education, leaving millions of students in poorly equipped schools or entirely out of the education system.

Corruption also plays a significant role in the underfunding of public universities. Despite the government's promises to improve the education system, public universities continue to face severe financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and poor working conditions for staff. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has regularly gone on strike to demand better funding, improved infrastructure, and timely payment of salaries for university staff. These strikes, which have become a recurrent feature of Nigerian academic life, often lead to long disruptions in academic schedules, further affecting the quality of education and the future of students. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) in 2019, Nigerian universities continue to rank poorly on the global scale due to these persistent issues.

One of the most visible consequences of the government's neglect of public universities is the rise of private universities. These institutions are often established by wealthy politicians who, dissatisfied with the state of public education, create alternatives that cater to those who can afford to pay for higher-quality education.

Private universities often provide better facilities, qualified staff, and more competitive academic programs than their public counterparts. As a result, they serve as preferred choices for parents seeking quality education for their children, particularly in light of the failures of public universities due to incessant strikes. However, this trend also deepens the divide between the wealthy elite and the general population, as only those who can afford the high tuition fees of private universities are able to access quality education, leaving a significant portion of the population with no options (Eghosa, 2015). This situation reflects the broader failure of the Nigerian government to prioritize education and address the systemic corruption within the sector. Corruption not only deprives students of the opportunity to receive a quality education but also perpetuates inequality by creating an education system that benefits only the elite, while the majority are left behind. The proliferation of private universities, while offering an alternative, highlights the widening gap in access to quality education between different socio-economic classes. Ultimately, the persistent corruption in Nigeria's education sector undermines national development. By diverting funds meant for educational advancement into the pockets of corrupt officials, the country loses the opportunity to build a strong, educated workforce capable of driving progress (Onyema, 2018).

### **Effect of Corruption on Healthcare System in Nigeria**

The National Academy of Medicine defines quality healthcare as being safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient, and providing equitable access to health services. Unfortunately, these standards are not met in most public healthcare centers in Nigeria, where healthcare delivery is severely hampered by systemic issues, including corruption, inadequate funding, and mismanagement. A major problem in Nigeria's healthcare system is the lack of trust in primary and secondary healthcare services. According to Ronke (2019), ideally, only 10% of Nigerians should need to visit teaching hospitals for treatment. However, due to the poor quality of care at lower-level facilities, many Nigerians bypass primary and secondary healthcare centers and head straight to tertiary hospitals. Tertiary hospitals are meant for more complex medical cases, and their overuse reflects the inadequacies in the overall healthcare infrastructure, which fails to meet the needs of the population. The lack of trust in basic healthcare services drives people to seek treatment at higher-level facilities, placing a strain on tertiary hospitals and further exacerbating the issue (Williams, 2019).

Health spending in Nigeria rarely exceeds 7% of the national budget, far below the 15% target set in the 2001

Abuja Declaration, where African nations committed to prioritizing health by allocating at least 15% of their national budgets to the sector (Ezra, 2022). This underfunding results in poorly equipped healthcare facilities, a lack of essential medications, and insufficient medical staff, all of which contribute to the overall dysfunction in Nigeria's healthcare system. Despite the already inadequate health budget, corrupt practices in the distribution of healthcare funds lead to the diversion of resources meant for the improvement of health services. According to Ezra (2022), corruption and theft within the healthcare sector have a detrimental impact on the delivery of quality care, as funds that should go into health infrastructure and personnel development are siphoned off by corrupt officials. This has led to the inefficiency of public health services, forcing Nigerians to seek medical treatment abroad, where it is discovered that Nigerians spend approximately \$3.82 million annually on foreign healthcare services (Agwu, *et al.*, 2023). This phenomenon, often referred to as "medical tourism," occurs because many Nigerians can no longer rely on the local healthcare system to meet their needs. The need to travel abroad for medical treatment is not only a financial burden on families but also a reflection of the failure of the country's healthcare infrastructure to meet the basic health needs of its citizens.

The lack of trust in public healthcare services is further compounded by the actions of political leaders, who often seek medical treatment abroad instead of utilizing the country's public healthcare system. Both former and current Presidents have sought treatment outside Nigeria. The former spent 109 days abroad for medical treatment, raising concerns about the state of healthcare in Nigeria (Friday, Leke, & Adebayo, 2023). Similarly, the current President was reported to have traveled to France for health-related reasons, though he claimed it was for a vacation. These actions by the country's leaders only serve to highlight the inadequacies of the domestic healthcare system and send a troubling message to the public about the government's commitment to improving healthcare for all Nigerians. The failure to address these issues has serious implications for the overall health and well-being of the population. Corruption, inadequate funding, and poor governance within the healthcare sector continue to deny millions of Nigerians access to essential services.

### **Effect of Corruption on Internal Security in Nigeria**

Internal security refers to a state in which citizens can live in safety and enjoy their rights and freedoms without fear of crime, accidents, or other disturbances. Internal security is essential for a stable society, as it enables citizens to go about their daily lives in peace and confidence (Grossman & Michelitch, 2018). Unfortunately, Nigeria faces severe internal security challenges, particularly in the northern regions, where the prevalence of insurgency, banditry, and terrorism has created a climate of fear and instability.

Nigeria's Vice President has attributed many of these security challenges to corrupt leadership. According to him, corruption undermines effective governance, weakens security institutions, and exacerbates the very problems it is meant to address. During the 10th Annual Lecture hosted by the Borno state governor in Maiduguri, he pointed out that the misuse of power by leaders contributes significantly to the rise of crime and insecurity (Luminous, 2024). Corruption in the leadership and security sectors creates a vicious cycle, where resources meant for securing the nation are instead diverted for personal gain, leaving the population vulnerable to various threats.

Corruption acts as a pervasive threat to internal security by eroding public trust in government institutions. When citizens lose faith in the ability of their leaders to address their concerns and provide basic security, they become less willing to cooperate with law enforcement, making it more difficult for authorities to prevent or address crime. A glaring example of the detrimental effects of corruption on internal security is the case involving an Investment company Limited, that received N4.6 billion in security funds from the Office of the former National Security Adviser (ONSA). These funds, were intended to enhance national security and bolster the fight against insurgency, instead, the money was misappropriated for personal benefits like sponsoring pilgrimages, funding a presidential campaign, and purchasing luxury vehicles for the elite, rather than being channeled into improving security infrastructure or supporting military operations. This diversion of funds not only led to a failure in securing the nation but also demoralized the security forces, who were left without the necessary resources to combat growing threats such as Boko Haram, kidnappers, and other criminal groups (Christopher & Abe, 2013).

The consequences of such corruption are far-reaching. When security forces lack the necessary equipment, training, and morale to tackle crime, it becomes harder to prevent or reduce criminal activities, further

destabilizing the nation. This leads to an increase in incidents such as terrorism, banditry, and armed robbery, which have become rampant in parts of the country, particularly in the north. Citizens are forced to live in constant fear of violent attacks, kidnappings, and extortion, which not only affect their physical safety but also undermine their mental well-being and economic stability. The lack of effective security also deters investment, as businesses and individuals are unwilling to operate in an environment where their safety cannot be guaranteed.

### **Effect of Corruption on the Administration of Justice System in Nigeria**

Corruption has profoundly hindered the effectiveness of democratic governance and the justice administration system in Nigeria. High levels of corruption erode citizens' trust in the government, discourage political participation, and influence voting patterns in ways that favor corrupt individuals and systems. Kazeem (2018) noted that, corruption is often used as a strategic tool to gain political power in Nigeria. Politicians and other influential figures frequently manipulate election outcomes through vote-buying, ballot-stuffing, and other illegal methods to ensure victory. Once in office, they tend to perpetuate corrupt practices to maintain power, further undermining the integrity of democratic processes (Akor & Olorunfemi, 2023).

One of the most damaging impacts of corruption on Nigeria's justice system is the erosion of the principle of equality before the law. Wealthy or well-connected individuals often evade prosecution, enjoying privileges that ordinary citizens cannot access. This disparity creates a sense of injustice among the population, fueling public distrust in the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. The judiciary, meant to serve as an impartial arbiter, is weakened when judges and law enforcement officials are susceptible to bribery or political influence. Adegboyega (2020) reports that Nigerian public officials received a staggering ₦721 billion (approximately \$1.26 billion) in bribes in 2023, with a significant portion going to judges and police officers, the very figures entrusted with upholding justice.

This issue is particularly troubling given Nigeria's challenges with human rights abuses, electoral fraud, and severe income inequality. For instance, in cases of electoral disputes, political elites influence court rulings through financial incentives, resulting in judgments that favor the powerful rather than ensuring a fair resolution. Similarly, ordinary citizens who cannot afford to pay bribes often face delays or denials of justice, while wealthy offenders enjoy undue leniency (Friday, Leke, & Adebayo, 2023).

The case of the police force is illustrative. In Nigeria, it is common for law enforcement officers to demand bribes from individuals, often threatening to delay legal processes or manipulate evidence. This practice, coupled with the financial vulnerability of low-ranking officers, has led to a situation where police services are effectively "for sale" to those who can pay, while the rights of the general populace are neglected. Furthermore, anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) are frequently undermined by political pressures, limiting their ability to prosecute high-profile cases effectively (Akogwu, et al., 2023).

### **Corruption Inducement of Economic Inflation and Hardships in Nigeria**

Corruption in Nigeria has a profound and detrimental effect on the country's economy, obstructing key financial systems, hindering growth, and discouraging both domestic and foreign investments. By diverting public funds, undermining tax collection, and preventing the enforcement of vital regulations, corruption creates an environment of economic instability. This corruption not only stifles development but also exacerbates inflation, increases production costs, and contributes to widespread poverty, making it a significant barrier to economic progress.

One of the most prominent examples of economic corruption in Nigeria involves former Minister of Petroleum Resources, who was accused of mismanaging \$3.5 billion (₦577 billion) in public funds without the proper budgetary approval. This scandal is just one of many instances of corruption within the oil sector, which is Nigeria's economic backbone. From 2012 to 2013, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) remitted only 24% of the proceeds from crude oil sales to the Federation Account, while the remaining 76% was reportedly misappropriated, leading to a loss of approximately \$20 billion (₦3.3 trillion) (Ibanegbu, 2020). Such mismanagement of public resources not only depletes the nation's wealth but also erodes public trust in government institutions, further harming economic stability (Krishnan, 2020).

The economic repercussions of this corruption are felt acutely by the Nigerian population, particularly in the form of rising inflation and an unstable currency. The devaluation of the naira, currently at ₦1,600 to \$1, has made imports more expensive and has driven up the cost of living, which has increased by more than 400% due to the removal of fuel subsidies (Adeola & Thompson, 2024). These measures, intended to reduce government expenditure, have disproportionately affected low-income households, who are now struggling to afford basic necessities. For example, fuel prices have skyrocketed, pushing up the cost of transportation and goods, while energy tariffs have risen by 250%, further burdening businesses and families (Adebayo, 2019).

Lack of effective governance and financial oversight has left Nigeria vulnerable to recurrent economic instability. Despite corruption being a global challenge, it is particularly severe in Nigeria, where it has significantly slowed the country's economic growth and created widespread hardship for its citizens. The absence of a functioning refining industry, for instance, has led to a reliance on expensive fuel imports, which further inflates costs across various sectors. The recent subsidy removal, although initially supported by some for its potential long-term benefits, has raised serious concerns about corruption and manipulation. The policy has caused significant public backlash due to the rising cost of living and questions about whether the funds saved from the subsidy removal will be effectively used for public development. The lack of affordable and reliable energy has also contributed to the relocation of several major companies. For example, Michelin and Dunlop moved their operations from Nigeria to Ghana, citing unstable electricity and security concerns. Procter & Gamble, another multinational corporation, is facing potential after-tax liabilities of between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion as it restructures its Nigerian operations due to the unfavorable business environment (Ronald, 2023).

This continued economic instability, exacerbated by corruption, has a cascading effect on the wider economy. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are crucial for job creation, are hit the hardest. High production costs, poor infrastructure, and limited access to financing make it difficult for businesses to thrive. As a result, many entrepreneurs are forced to shut down or relocate their businesses abroad, leading to a further loss of jobs and economic opportunities.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations:**

The primary objective of any government is to ensure the safety, quality of life, and socioeconomic well-being of its citizens by implementing effective policies and programs. However, in Nigeria a country often hailed as the "giant of Africa" corruption continues to hinder the progress of public governance, despite decades of independence. Since independence, Nigeria has faced persistent issues of corruption, resulting in poor governance and causing economic setbacks amidst widespread poverty.

Corruption in Nigeria is not limited to politicians and policymakers; bureaucrats, public servants, and civil servants also engage in corrupt practices, often due to low wages and inadequate welfare benefits. The impact of corruption is visible across multiple sectors of governance: it obstructs justice, drives up inflation, destabilizes security, degrades healthcare and educational services, and erodes the welfare of civil and public servants. Corruption and ineffective governance form a vicious cycle lack of effective governance creates room for corruption, and corruption, in turn, undermines good governance.

To address the challenges as abserved, the following recommendations outline critical steps toward achieving and experiencing good governance in Nigeria.

Reducing the high costs of governance will enable the reallocation of resources to improve minimum wages for civil and public servants, helping to address economic challenges that often fuel corruption.

The federal government should prioritize educational funding from primary to tertiary levels and honor agreements made with educational institutions, which will improve the quality of education, prevent strikes, and create a more sustainable educational system that supports the country's development.

The federal government should allocate at least 15% of the national budget to healthcare, import essential medical equipment, and recruit foreign specialists when necessary to improve the local healthcare system.

The Ministry of Defense should organize foreign training sessions for security personnel and equip them with advanced tools like drones, surveillance robots, and other modern safety equipment.

Following the removal of fuel subsidies, the federal government should reinvest these savings into essential infrastructure projects, including the construction of refineries, improvement of electricity supply, and road maintenance.

Law enforcement agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), the police, and the judiciary must operate independently, free from political interference. This approach will help ensure that justice prevails and that government institutions remain accountable to the public.

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