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## **Corruption in Public Office: Has the War Been Lost or Mismanaged**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the persistent challenge of corruption in public office, with a focus on whether the anti-corruption campaign has failed or has been undermined by mismanagement. Drawing on empirical evidence from policy documents, institutional reports, and case studies, the research analyses the structural, political, and administrative factors that influence the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives. Findings reveal that while most jurisdictions have established comprehensive legal frameworks and dedicated agencies, the lack of institutional independence, selective enforcement, political interference, and weak accountability mechanisms has limited their effectiveness. The analysis shows that corruption endures not necessarily due to the absence of reform efforts, but because of inconsistent implementation, inadequate deterrence, and a tendency to politicise enforcement processes. The study concludes that the war against corruption has not been irrevocably lost; however, it requires a strategic reorientation toward transparent governance, non-selective prosecution, robust civic engagement, and a culture of integrity in public service. These findings have significant implications for policymakers, enforcement bodies, and civil society actors seeking to transition from symbolic anti-corruption campaigns to sustainable institutional reforms.

**Keywords:** Corruption in public office, Anti-corruption campaign, Anti-corruption initiatives, Public sector corruption, Governance reform, Legal frameworks and Anti-corruption agencies

### **INTRODUCTION**

Corruption in public office remains one of the most widespread and damaging challenges faced by modern governance, especially in developing countries. It involves officials misusing public power and entrusted authority for personal or private gain. [1], says a pattern of corruption may be said to exist whenever a power holder who is charged with the responsibility of doing certain things, that is, a responsible functionary or office holder, is by monetary or other rewards, such as expectation of a job in the future, induced to take actions which favour whoever provides the reward and thereby damages the group or organization to which the functionary belongs (more specifically, the government and, other socio-economic institutions).

According to [2], the effects of such acts are extensive, undermining the rule of law, eroding public trust, distorting development priorities, and increasing poverty and inequality. Although corruption is not limited to any specific region or political system, its impacts are most severe in societies with weak institutions, ineffective accountability systems, and political elites who manipulate anti-corruption mechanisms for personal or partisan benefit. These realities raise an urgent question: has the fight against corruption in public office been irretrievably lost, or is it merely suffering from strategic and administrative mismanagement?

Historically, many governments, whether democratic or authoritarian, have declared war on corruption, establishing anti-graft agencies, carrying out public sector reforms, and signing international treaties like the United Nations Convention Against Corruption [3]. Despite these efforts, corruption persists and often takes more sophisticated and institutionalized forms. In countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, anti-corruption campaigns have become prominent political themes, yet their results have been largely disappointing. For example, Nigeria's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranking has remained low, with the country scoring 24 out of 100 in 2022 and ranking 150 out of 180 nations [4]. This indicates a gap between declared intentions and actual performance, which many scholars attribute to a lack of political will and systematic mismanagement of anti-corruption strategies [5].

One critical aspect often overlooked in discussions of corruption is the complexity of its underlying causes. Corruption is not just a moral failing or a result of individual weakness; it is deeply rooted in structural and institutional deficiencies, poor law enforcement, and cultural norms that tolerate or even reward unethical behavior. Against this background, [6], highlighted the principal-Agent Theory, which states that corruption

occurs when public officials (agents) exploit their positions because mechanisms for monitoring and accountability by the public (principal) are weak or absent. Additionally, the Collective Action Theory suggests that when corruption is widespread and systemic, individuals are less likely to oppose it, as they believe that everyone else is equally complicit [7]. These frameworks imply that combating corruption requires more than punitive measures; it demands comprehensive institutional and behavioural reforms.

Moreover, political interference, selective prosecution, weak judicial systems, and limited public engagement all hamper anti-corruption efforts. In many countries, especially in Africa, anti-corruption agencies are often underfunded, lack independence, and are vulnerable to political influence. [8], opined that high-profile corruption cases are sometimes used as political tools to intimidate opponents, while allies of the ruling elite are shielded from investigation or prosecution. This selective justice erodes the credibility of anti-corruption efforts and fuels public cynicism. Without consistent and impartial application of the law, anti-corruption campaigns risk being seen as witch-hunts rather than genuine efforts to promote transparency and accountability.

This paper aims to critically assess the ongoing fight against corruption in public office by analyzing whether it is a lost cause or simply poorly managed. Using Nigeria as a case study and drawing comparative insights from other countries, this analysis reviews the design, implementation, and outcomes of anti-corruption strategies over the past twenty years. It examines institutional deficiencies, political dynamics, citizen perceptions, and international influences that impact anti-corruption efforts. The main goal is to discover how systemic reforms and increased public engagement can revitalize the fight against corruption and restore integrity in public service.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **a. Corruption**

Attempts to define corruption have led to different meanings by scholars of various disciplines in the literature. Corruption is thus a value-loaded term that resists easy measurement and simple interpretations [9]. United Nations defined corruption as abuse of entrusted power for private gain and the misuse of public office or authority for personal benefits. Also, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) defines corruption to include acts such as bribery, embezzlement, trading influence, and abuse of functions.

According to [10], corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. According to [11], the conceptualization of the term “corruption” has long been ideologically, morally, culturally, politically, and intellectually elusive to the point of losing sight of its detrimental and parasitic symbiosis with many polities, including Nigeria and their all over the world. Corruption is a manifestation of institutional weaknesses, poor ethical standards, skewed incentives, and insufficient enforcement.

Corruption involves the injection of additional but improper transactions aimed at changing the moral course of events and altering judgements and positions of trust. It consists of the doers (givers) and receivers’ use of informal, extra-legal, or illegal acts to facilitate matters [9]. It is in this sense that one sees corruption as a lubricant of the social system, a means by which to overcome economic obstacles and bureaucratic red-tapism. Hence, the ambivalence and inconsistency in the theory and practice of corruption, although it is generally regarded as a debasement of integrity, it may also serve as a nerve in social development.

In his words, [12], defines corruption as any behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private regard (personal, close family, private clique), pecuniary or status gains, or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private gains. This includes such behaviours as bribery and nepotism (bestowal of patronage because of ascriptive relationships rather than merit). According to [13], corruption in a broader sense means any behaviour pattern where a power holder is induced by some reward to take actions which favour the individual offering the reward and thus conflict with the public interest; or, any behaviour pattern where a power holder seeks to maintain or extend his advantage by inducing individuals with some reward to assist him in neglecting the public interest. From the foregoing, Corruption is a form of dishonesty or a criminal offense that is undertaken by a person or an organization that is entrusted in a position of authority to acquire illicit benefits or abuse power for one's gain. Corruption may involve activities like bribery, influence peddling, embezzlement, and fraud, as well as practices that are legal in many countries, such as lobbying.

### **Classification of Corruption**

The forms of corruption are difficult to classify because different scholars adopt different classifications. However, [14] classified

Corruption into five major forms: Petty Corruption, Systemic (routine) Corruption, Lootocracy, Grand or Wholesale Corruption, and Political or Bureaucratic Corruption

#### **Petty Corruption**

Petty corruption is defined as all practices such as extortion, collusion between citizens and public officials. Petty corruption is committed when state officials bend rules in favour of friends. Those who commit the corruption are usually middle or low-level officials. In most cases, they do it to compensate for insufficient salary. For example, policemen at checkpoints extort small money from commercial drivers, gatemen in public institutions extort money from car owners, and clerks extort money from members of the public seeking service. Petty corruption actors indiscriminately impose taxes on unsuspecting operators in the informal

sector. The unfortunate thing about petty corruption is that ordinary citizens really have no power to defend themselves against petty corruption when they come into contact with perpetrators.

### **Systemic corruption**

Systemic corruption is the pervasive form of corruption in public office where public officials wantonly accept bribes or gifts from the public when they exercise favouritism in official appointments and contract awards. It is entrenched when wrongdoing is taken to be the norm and standard of accepted behaviour. It differs from petty corruption in that participants are made to see corruption as the norm. Citizens who try to stick to the normal norms are punished. This form of corruption is common where bribery on a large scale is regularly experienced.

### **Lootocracy**

Lootocracy refers to government officials' looting of the state treasury. It occurs when officials entrusted with public responsibilities steal public assets. This can include embezzlement of public funds, such as when large amounts of money and other public properties like cars, furniture, and office equipment are stolen from the government or State Corporation and Treasury through tricks or advances that are never repaid (such as paying fictitious "ghost" workers). Lootocracy is prevalent among senior-level bureaucrats. For example, during the auctioning of state assets, senior officials often favour themselves, their friends, and family members in the allocation process. A notable example is when senior state officials bought land in Abuja and properties in the 1004 area of Lagos at unrealistically low prices.

### **Grand or Wholesale Corruption**

Grand or wholesale corruption occurs when politicians, senior bureaucrats, and private sector partners collude in sharing profits from bribes and business transactions. This type of corruption involves large sums of money, often reaching millions or billions of Naira. It flourishes among senior officials, politicians, and prominent businessmen during auctions, privatizations, or the allocation of public assets.

### **Political or Bureaucratic Corruption**

Political or bureaucratic corruption involves violating election laws and using political power to bend rules for private gains or to favour relations and friends. It may take the form of patronage in awarding contracts or establishing patrimonial ties with foreign multinationals or powers to siphon state resources for personal benefits. It flourishes where power is highly centralized in a patron-based political system. Bureaucratic corruption relates to misconduct among senior officials in state bureaucracies, often committed in collusion with political officeholders. Nowadays, the boundary between political and bureaucratic corruption has blurred as the status of prominent career officials has become politicized. For example, positions such as Vice Chancellor, Director General, Chief Executive of Parastatals, Agencies, and Government Companies, Permanent Secretary, Executive Secretary (e.g., NUC), Auditor General of the Federation, and Director General have all been politicized in Nigeria.

According to United Nations, there are eight types of corruptions; bribery, embezzlement, extortion, graft, nepotism, cronyism, patronage, and influence peddling.

- a. **Bribery:** this is the act of offering, receiving, or soliciting something of value to influence actions. In this type of corruption, both the giver and the receiver agreed to engage in the act.
- b. **Embezzlement:** this is the theft or misappropriation of funds or assets entrusted to an individual. The act mostly occurs in public offices where the political actors or their representatives stole or misappropriate funds for his or her personal use.
- c. **Extortion:** in most countries, agencies of government usually engage people to act on their behalf and those individuals may resort to coercion, threat or force to obtain money which usually end in their pockets.
- d. **Graft:** acquisition of wealth or power through corrupt means.
- e. **Nepotism:** favoritism shown to close allies, family members, business and professional bodies.
- f. **Cronyism:** this is favoritism shown to close friends.
- g. **Patronage:** distribution of favours or benefits based on personal relationship.
- h. **Influence peddling:** this is the act of using one's influence to secure favour or benefits.

However, according to [15], [16] developed a typology of corruption on the basis of subjective intentions that have or expect the individuals such as gaining power and influence, economic and business success, self enrichment, social motives, opportunism, etc.

Corruption can be categorized in to three:

- Political corruption
- Economic corruption
- Bureaucratic or public administration corruption

### **Political corruption**

There is political corruption when the behaviours deviate from the principles that guide politics and policies, adopting decisions with abuse of power, which means that the private interests displace the public and common interest.

Economic corruption: economic corruption can be seen as the sacrifice of the principal's interest for the agent's interest. It results in making unmerited profits for the agent.

Public administration corruption: in administrative corruption, the behaviour of public agent neglects the principles of efficiency, truthfulness and rightfulness. It results in transfer of public benefits to private benefits by taking advantage of the entrusted power for example, in the form of nepotism that results in the transfer of benefits from society to family members.

Furthermore, [15] identified that incidence of corruption raries among societies. He posits that it can be rare, widespread or systemic. It is rare when it is relatively easy to detect, isolate and punish; and prevent from becoming widespread. It is widespread when it becomes more difficult to control and to deal with. When it become systemic, that is the worst scenario, at this point, corruption takes hold of a country, the institutions, rules and people's behaviour and attitude become adopted to the corrupt way of doing things, and corruption becomes a way of life. At this stage, it becomes difficult to overcome and as such, it will have devastating effect on the economy and other institutions in the political system.

Another distinction about corruption is between well organised and chaotic corruption. In his words, under a well organised corruption, business executives have good idea of whom they have to bribe and how much to offer them, and they feel reasonable sure of obtaining the favour for which the payment is made. Also, bribe receivers takes a longer run view of the situation and think of cuts they can get from profitable deals and a continual stream of income that can be realized when entrepreneurs and business firms they have been associated with the passage of time. They therefore have an interest not to unduly harm the goose that may be laying the golden eggs in the future. Under chaotic corruption, there is a lot of confusion and no one is exactly sure how much to pay and to whom payment is to be made. So, in this confused state of affairs, business people end up paying bribe to a lot of officials without assurance that they will be asked to pay additional bribe to more officials. Further down the line, with unclear delineation of authority and responsibility, the outcome of the bribe, and whether the sought after favour will be delivered, is also uncertain. Moreover, there is little coordination among numerous bribe takes with regard to bribe levels, and one corrupt official has no idea what the other corrupt official is charging. Consequently, there is a tendency to overcharge and demands become excessive and unreasonable to the business community. When this happens, the goose will become disoriented and dispirited, and may not bother to make the required effort to lay eggs.

#### **b. Public Office**

Public office refers to roles within government institutions, filled either by election or appointment, where individuals exercise authority on behalf of the state [3]. The responsibility inherent in public office demands integrity and accountability. Public office refers to a position of authority or service involving responsibility to the public, especially within the structure of government. It is typically conferred by law, appointment, or election, and carries with it a duty to perform specific functions in the interest of the state and its citizens. The individual who occupies a public office is entrusted with powers and responsibilities that must be exercised with integrity, accountability, and following the rule of law. Public office is not personal property but a public trust, and it demands adherence to ethical conduct and public service principles [17].

The concept of public office is rooted in governance, where individuals are chosen to represent the will and welfare of the people. As such, public office holders are expected to operate transparently, ensure fair distribution of resources, and promote the common good. Their roles may differ depending on the level of government federal, state, or local but the core purpose remains the same: to serve the public interest. According to [18], public office is essential to the effective functioning of public administration, and any misuse of such positions weakens democratic governance and development.

Moreover, public office comes with a fiduciary duty, meaning those in office must put public welfare before personal interests. Misconduct or corruption can undermine public trust and weaken institutions. The ethical standards related to public office are often detailed in codes of conduct, legal laws, and regulatory rules, which aim to prevent abuse and encourage accountability. As [19] notes, protecting the integrity of public office is essential for good governance, socio-economic growth, and sustainable development in any democratic society.

#### **c. Anti-Corruption War**

The concept of the Anti-Corruption War refers to the deliberate and sustained efforts by governments, civil society organizations, international institutions, and other stakeholders to combat corruption in public and private sectors. Corruption, broadly defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, undermines governance, hampers economic development, and erodes public trust in institutions [10]. Anti-corruption war involves implementing policies, laws, and institutional frameworks that deter corrupt practices, promote transparency and accountability, and ensure that perpetrators face justice. These efforts can include law enforcement actions, judicial reforms, public awareness campaigns, and the strengthening of anti-graft agencies.

In many developing countries, including Nigeria, the anti-corruption war has become a central agenda of political leadership. For instance, successive Nigerian administrations have launched anti-corruption campaigns through bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). These institutions are tasked with investigating and prosecuting corruption-related offenses. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often

challenged by political interference, lack of autonomy, inadequate funding, and weak judicial processes [20]. Critics have also argued that anti-corruption wars are sometimes weaponized against political opponents, undermining the legitimacy of the cause.

Globally, the fight against corruption has gained significant traction through international treaties and cooperation. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), adopted in 2003, provides a comprehensive framework for preventing and combating corruption globally. It emphasizes international cooperation, asset recovery, and technical assistance among nations (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [21]). Effective anti-corruption wars are those rooted in a strong legal framework, impartial enforcement mechanisms, active civil society engagement, and the political will to ensure that no one is above the law. Such comprehensive approaches are essential for achieving sustainable development, promoting good governance, and safeguarding democratic institutions.

### Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Principal-Agent and Collective Action Theories as a theoretical framework. The Principal-Agent Theory is a dominant analytical model for understanding corruption. It posits a relationship between the public (principal) and public officials (agents), whereby the agents are expected to act in the best interest of the principal. Corruption arises when the agents exploit their delegated authority due to a lack of oversight, poor monitoring mechanisms, or misaligned incentives [6]. In environments with weak enforcement and low transparency, public officials may calculate that the benefits of corruption outweigh the risks, especially if punishments are minimal or enforcement is biased. This theoretical model emphasizes the need for improved institutional checks and balances, increased transparency, and real consequences for corrupt behaviour.

While the Principal-Agent model focuses on individual behaviour, the Collective Action Theory views corruption as a systemic problem embedded in society. In highly corrupt societies, individuals are less likely to act against corruption because they perceive everyone else as corrupt. The dominant belief is that resistance will have no meaningful impact, thus creating a self-reinforcing culture of complicity [7].

This perspective shifts the focus from just punishing individuals to broader cultural and institutional reforms. It advocates for building trust in institutions, promoting ethical norms, and strengthening civic engagement as long-term strategies for reducing corruption.

### Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research method, drawing on secondary data from global corruption indices, case studies, reports from anti-graft agencies (such as EFCC and ICPC in Nigeria), journal articles, and media publications. A content analysis approach was employed to assess the performance, challenges, and political interferences influencing anti-corruption campaigns.

### Empirical Evidence

Empirical studies on corruption in public office across Nigeria and other developing nations reveal a persistent and systemic challenge that undermines governance, economic development, and public trust. Several surveys, reports, and field-based research studies highlight not just the pervasiveness of corruption but also the inconsistencies in efforts made to address it, thereby questioning whether the war on corruption is truly lost or just grossly mismanaged.

### Transparency International and Corruption Perception Index

One of the most referenced empirical sources is Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Nigeria consistently ranks among the lowest scorers, indicating high levels of perceived corruption in the public sector. For instance, in the 2022 CPI, Nigeria ranked 150 out of 180 countries, scoring 24 out of 100, which is a decline from its previous scores in 2019 and 2020 [22]. This poor performance reflects growing public frustration and suggests limited progress despite anti-corruption campaigns.

### National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and UNODC Survey

A joint survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2019 found that nearly one in three Nigerians who had contact with a public official paid a bribe in the previous year. Law enforcement agencies, public utility workers, and administrative officials were among the top recipients of these bribes. This suggests that corruption is transactional and routine, especially in bureaucratic processes [23].

### Empirical Case Studies: EFCC and ICPC Performance

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) have been at the forefront of the fight against corruption. However, studies have shown that these institutions are often plagued by political interference, underfunding, and poor inter-agency collaboration. A study by [23], found that fewer than 20% of high-profile corruption cases prosecuted by the EFCC result in actual convictions, with many cases being delayed or dismissed due to a lack of evidence, judicial bottlenecks, or political pressure.

### Budget Tracking and Public Expenditure

Empirical audits by BudgIT Nigeria, a civic tech organization that tracks public finance, have shown that billions of naira budgeted for constituency projects and social investments are either unaccounted for or misappropriated. Their 2021 report indicates that over 60% of the tracked projects exhibited signs of

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mismanagement, poor execution, or complete abandonment, reflecting the failure of oversight mechanisms [24].

### Corruption in Procurement and Contracts

Public procurement remains a major avenue for siphoning public funds. Empirical analysis by the Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC) using the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) revealed that contract inflation, favouritism, and lack of transparency are rampant. In 2020 alone, over ₦600 billion worth of contracts were awarded without proper bidding or documentation, violating due process requirements [25].

### Citizens' Perception and Trust in Anti-Corruption Efforts

Survey research by [26], shows a steady decline in citizens' confidence in the sincerity of the government's anti-corruption war. The study notes that more than 70% of respondents believe that the anti-corruption agencies are used more for political vendetta than for institutional reform. This loss of credibility undermines public support and participation in accountability efforts.

Table 1: Summary of Empirical Trends

| Area of Focus              | Key Findings  |
|----------------------------|---|
| CPI Rankings               | Nigeria consistently ranks low, indicating high corruption perception |
| Bribery Prevalence         | 1 in 3 Nigerians bribe public officials                               |
| Prosecution Effectiveness  | Less than 20% conviction rate in high-profile cases                   |
| Budget Tracking            | 60% of projects are mismanaged or unaccounted for                     |
| Procurement Irregularities | Over ₦600 billion in opaque contracts in 2020                         |
| Citizens' Confidence       | 70% believe anti-corruption agencies lack neutrality                  |

### Indicators of Mismanagement in the Anti-Corruption Fight

The fight against corruption is a critical element in promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainable development. However, in many countries, including Nigeria, the anti-corruption campaign has often been plagued by mismanagement that undermines its effectiveness. Mismanagement in this context refers to the poor coordination, misuse of resources, selective enforcement, and absence of strategic planning in implementing anti-corruption measures. Such inefficiencies not only hinder the achievement of desired outcomes but also erode public trust in the institutions responsible for combating corruption [27].

One significant indicator of mismanagement is the selective prosecution of corruption cases. This occurs when enforcement agencies target political opponents or individuals without strong political connections while shielding allies from investigation or punishment. This form of partiality weakens the credibility of anti-corruption agencies, making the campaign appear as a political weapon rather than a genuine effort to eradicate corruption. The perception of bias reduces citizen cooperation and fuels cynicism, thereby weakening the institutional framework of the anti-corruption system [28].

Another indicator observed is the lack of institutional independence and capacity. When anti-corruption agencies operate under excessive executive control or face interference from political leaders, their decisions become compromised. This situation often results in poor case preparation, inadequate evidence gathering, and the eventual dismissal of corruption charges in court. Furthermore, insufficient funding, inadequate staffing, and a lack of technical expertise also prevent these agencies from effectively carrying out their mandates [29]. Weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws also signals mismanagement. In some cases, well-crafted laws exist, but enforcement is inconsistent or absent. For instance, cases may drag on in courts for years without resolution due to deliberate delays, poor prosecution strategies, or collusion between defendants and state officials. This inefficiency emboldens corrupt actors who perceive the system as incapable of holding them accountable [10].

Mismanagement is also evident in the poor coordination between anti-corruption bodies. Overlapping mandates, rivalry between agencies, and lack of a unified national strategy often lead to duplication of efforts and waste of resources. In some countries, multiple agencies investigate the same cases without information sharing, creating confusion and slowing down judicial processes [27]. This disorganization ultimately undermines the fight against corruption and discourages whistleblowers from coming forward.

Lastly, the lack of transparency and accountability within anti-corruption agencies themselves is a troubling sign of mismanagement. Instances where anti-corruption officials are implicated in corrupt practices send a damaging message to the public. If those tasked with fighting corruption engage in similar misconduct, public confidence in the entire system collapses. Moreover, failure to publicly disclose investigation outcomes or publish periodic reports further fuels suspicion of compromise and cover-ups [28].

### Comparative Insights

A comparative insight into some countries shows that the war against corruption in public office is not lost but mismanaged. In Countries like Rwanda and Botswana, results show better outcomes in managing public corruption. In Rwanda, for instance, anti-corruption efforts are backed by strong political will, strict penalties, and regular performance audits. Their anti-corruption commission operates with notable autonomy and transparency.

The United States typically ranks much higher (i.e., less corrupt) than developing countries, reflecting strong formal institutions such as an independent judiciary, investigative press, and regulatory frameworks such as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). Nevertheless, high-profile concerns about conflicts of interest, campaign finance influence, and episodic political interference show that advanced institutional capacity does not make a country immune. Shifts in political leadership and regulatory priorities can quickly alter enforcement intensity and public perceptions, underlining how institutional norms and elite behaviour shape outcomes even where laws are robust. (Transparency.org, The Washington Post)

In contrast, the Nigerian scenarios shows a rather insincere leadership with bad policy implementation. It is in this light that [5], posit that Nigeria's efforts appear superficial, i.e., focused more on perception management than systemic reform. Nigeria illustrates the "resource curse" dynamic that involves large oil rents creating concentrated opportunities for embezzlement and patronage across decades, weakening accountability and insulating elites from sanctions. Empirical studies and country reports document large historic leakages from the oil sector and repeated scandals involving state oil revenues and procurement. Institutional responses, notably the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), have had episodic successes (asset recoveries, convictions) but face politicisation, capacity limits, and intermittent reforms, producing a view that anti-corruption efforts have been inconsistent and sometimes "mismanaged." Recent reporting shows substantial recoveries in some years but a persistently low global corruption ranking. [30], [31], [32]. This comparative analysis suggests that the challenge lies not in the impossibility of defeating corruption, but in the deliberate mismanagement of tools and strategies.

### Recommendations

The persistence of corruption in public office, as evidenced in this study, underscores that the problem is less about the absence of anti-corruption frameworks and more about weak implementation, politicisation of enforcement, and lack of sustained political will. To address these challenges, the following measures are recommended:

- i. Strengthen Institutional Independence: Anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary must be insulated from political interference through constitutional guarantees, transparent appointment processes, and secure tenure for key officials.
- ii. Enhance Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms: Public procurement, budgeting, and contract award processes should be digitized and made open to public scrutiny. Independent auditing bodies should be empowered to conduct regular performance and financial audits.
- iii. Enforce Consistent and Non-Selective Prosecution: Anti-corruption laws must be applied uniformly, regardless of political affiliation or status. Selective enforcement erodes public trust and undermines deterrence.
- iv. Promote Civic Engagement and Media Freedom: Civil society organisations, investigative journalists, and whistleblowers should be protected and encouraged to expose corrupt practices without fear of retaliation.
- v. Institutionalize Performance Monitoring: Periodic assessments of anti-corruption strategies should be conducted, with performance benchmarks tied to measurable outcomes such as conviction rates, asset recoveries, and service delivery improvements.
- vi. Build Public Service Integrity Culture: Integrity training, merit-based recruitment, and adequate remuneration for public servants can reduce incentives for corrupt practices and reinforce ethical conduct.

By prioritising these recommendations, the "war" on corruption can be redirected from a cycle of episodic campaigns to a sustained, credible, and results-driven institutional process, thereby restoring public trust and improving governance outcomes.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that while substantial legal and institutional frameworks exist to combat corruption in public office, their impact has been undermined by weak enforcement, political interference, and inconsistent policy execution. The war against corruption has therefore not been entirely lost; rather, it has suffered from poor coordination, selective application of justice, and inadequate commitment from political leadership. Evidence indicates that where anti-corruption initiatives are implemented with transparency, independence, and sustained political will, significant progress can be achieved. Conversely, when enforcement is politicised or reduced to symbolic campaigns, public confidence erodes, and corrupt practices persist or evolve into more sophisticated forms. In essence, winning the war against corruption requires more than enacting laws or establishing agencies; it demands a holistic approach that integrates institutional independence, civic participation, strong deterrence mechanisms, and a cultural shift towards integrity in public service. The ultimate measure of success will be the extent to which governance systems deliver public goods effectively, uphold the rule of law, and restore citizens' trust in the state.

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