



Corruption in Governance and its Effect on National Security: The Nigeria Experience in the Fourth Republic

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Abstract. This study examines the impact of corruption in governance on national security within the context of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study relies exclusively on secondary data sourced from government reports, scholarly analyses, media publications, and institutional records. The theoretical framework underpinning this investigation is Elite Theory, which posits that a small group of influential individuals wields disproportionate control over political power and state resources, often to the detriment of the broader population. Through this lens, the study explores how corrupt practices among political elites have undermined the integrity and effectiveness of national security institutions. Findings reveal that first, corruption among government officials has led to the diversion of critical resources intended for security operations, weakening the capacity of security agencies to respond effectively to threats. Second, the patronage networks fostered by elites perpetuate a cycle of impunity that erodes public trust in governance structures and security apparatuses. Third, systemic corruption has contributed significantly to the proliferation of armed groups and criminal enterprises that exploit governance weaknesses to destabilize the nation. Based on these findings, the study recommends: (1) strengthening institutional checks and balances to promote transparency and accountability among political elites; (2) enhancing the independence and operational capacity of anti-corruption agencies to pursue high-profile cases without political interference; and (3) implementing civic education programs to empower citizens to demand better governance and security provisions, thereby reducing the socio-political space for corruption to flourish. Ultimately, addressing corruption through an elite

perspective provides critical insights into the intersection of governance and national security challenges in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Keywords: Governance, Corruption, Transparency, Accountability, National Security and Legitimacy Crises

1. Introduction

Corruption in governance remains a formidable challenge to national security, especially in developing democracies such as Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Corruption, defined as the misuse of public office for personal gain, permeates various levels of government and institutional structures, significantly weakening the state's capacity to maintain law and order. In Nigeria, corrupt practices have undermined governmental institutions tasked with ensuring security and justice, such as the police and judiciary, thereby fostering a culture of impunity and eroding public trust (Yagboyaju, 2023). This systemic corruption facilitates criminal enterprises, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and arms smuggling, by enabling illicit networks to operate with impunity, further destabilizing the nation. Subsequently, the diversion of public funds for personal enrichment has deprived crucial sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure of much-needed investment, aggravating inequality and social discontent that fuel insecurity (Ogundiya, 2010; Onwuka, Okoh, & Eme, 2009).

The Nigerian experience since the advent of the Fourth Republic highlights the profound nexus between corruption and national insecurity. Research and reports have revealed extensive cases of financial

misappropriation, embezzlement, and contract fraud involving high-profile political office holders, including governors and ministers, which have eroded governance effectiveness and legitimacy (EFCC Report, 2013; Kofarmata, 2005). Beyond economic sabotage, corruption has compromised the enforcement of laws, weakened democratic institutions, and obstructed efforts to confront security threats such as insurgency and organized crime (Agbafe, 2005). The political culture that equates public office with personal wealth acquisition further sustains corruption, thereby undermining national cohesion and the capacity to establish a stable security environment.

This study is significant as it seeks to deepen understanding of how corruption in governance impairs national security in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, providing empirical insights and highlighting policy implications vital for reforms. It aims to illuminate the structural challenges undermining security governance and to contribute to the development of effective anti-corruption strategies that strengthen institutional capacities. The study has three objectives: (1) to assess the impact of corruption on the effectiveness of security agencies in Nigeria; (2) to examine how corruption fosters insecurity and social instability; and (3) to suggest policy measures that can mitigate corruption and enhance national security. Correspondingly, three research questions guide the inquiry: (1) what is the extent of corruption's influence on security institutions in Nigeria? (2) How does corruption exacerbate insecurity and social disorder? And (3) what policy interventions can effectively curb corruption to improve national security outcomes?

2. Conceptual Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Good Governance

Good governance entails a structured culture and institution through which the leadership of a state exercises its authority. These consist of even the process through which government is selected, monitored and replaced. Governance reflects the capacity of government to effectively formulate and implement policies and programmes. (Ogege, 2013) conceptualized governance as the capacity of the political leadership to effectively formulate and implement sound policies and the respect of citizens and the state including the institutions that governs the economy and social interaction amongst others. While this conceptualization captures to a large extent the major functions of government in a system, it also paves the way to a large extent the definition of good governance.

Odock (2006) refers to Good Governance as a system of government based on good leadership, respect for rule of law and due process, accountability/transparency of the state leadership to the citizens. The implication of the aforementioned definition connotes that good governance combines the aforementioned amongst others all in a bid to enhance happiness for greater majority in the political system.

This paper further emphasizes on the ability of the political leadership of the state, to project happiness and good living condition for its citizens, through the provision of infrastructure, transparency and accountable to the citizens. (Rosenboom, Kravchuk & Clerkin, 2009), argued that good governance in political systems entail the creation of job opportunity to curb the high level of unemployment in the system. The ability of the state through its leadership to also perform its core functions of providing security of lives and property to its citizens, amongst others will enhance better living condition for citizens in the political system.

Good governance therefore can also be viewed as the use of democratic culture and principles by the political leadership of a state in the effective performance of state and governmental functions to its citizens. The basic assumption here is the capacity of the political leadership in using the state apparatus and resources within its disposal to create and implement policies and programmes that reflect the overall interest of majority of its citizens through an institutionalized structure. This enables the political leadership gathers more confidence and legitimacy from the citizens and the citizens in returns enjoy more freedoms and better living standard from the political system.

2.2 Conceptualizing Corruption

Corruption is a basic negative factor that dwarf efforts aimed at ensuring good governance in any system. (Haus, 2009) argued that, state and private institutions acting outside the stipulated rules or their actions and inactions if propelled by selfish gains or based on illegal means of enhancing gratifications. This conceptualization emphasized on actions of institutions of both government and that of the private sector that does not follow laid down rules, rather, these actions are aimed at propelling selfish gains. (Shively, 2008) sees corruption as a political-economic condition, which involves acts by public officials and individuals within a political system, ignoring rules and acting selfishly to enhance their personal gains. The corollary of this definition is that, corruption has both political and economic

implications on the society. For example, the government official that inflates contract sum of project and receive kickbacks is unlawfully increasing the cost of governance thereby reducing economic growth and the voter that is financially induced before or after voting is engendering the enthronement of an unpopular government in the political system. (Ogundiya, 2009) conceptualized political corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gains. This implies that, all action and inactions of public official that are carried out in a way to reflect selfish or private gains is classified as corruption. Also, the (World Bank, 2013) enlarged the scope of corruption as comprising all actions involving the abuse of public powers for private benefit. Taking these conceptualizations into consideration, it is easy to observe that, political institutions of the Nigerian fourth Republic are conceived to be immense in corruption. This includes those in the Executive arm of government, the legislators and judiciary. Their action includes excessive hiking of contract sum for projects, padding of budgets to suit personal interest and pervasion of justice for financial gains amongst other. Though successive government and regimes since 1999 had maintained a trajectory of pretence in the area of fighting corruption with the creation of institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). These have empirically not reduced or abated the issue, owing to top government involvement and general insincerity on the issue. These behaviours are part of those issues negatively affecting the fourth republic democracy and hindering the people from enjoying good governance.

2.3 Conceptualizing National Security

National security concept revolves round an assumed state of being secured, that is, if it is not in a situation where it loses its state sovereignty and independence. In this sense, the core values, as well as its wishes to deter aggression or to be victorious in war if unavoidable. Conceptualizing national security. (Akpuru-Aja 2009) argued that, national security presupposes the existence of a nation with shared consciousness, a people who have agreed to live and work together. Security is the direct opposite of insecurity and it refers to a situation of being insecure, unsafe and frightened with danger and the want of security or stability around the political system. Nigeria's national security objectives can be itemized as consisting of the following concerns: as emphasized by (Jega 2007) peaceful coexistence, food security, sustainable socio-economic development; and democratic development, which involve strengthening

the rule of law; creating a democratic Political culture and nurturing civility suitable for democratic sustenance. In essence, peace, stability, socio, political and economic development coupled with other factors revolves round a strong political culture that emphasizes the rule of law. Such political system creates an environment that is conducive for individuals and groups to live their lives to the fullest, without fear and intimidation. This is why (McNamara, 1968) noted that, the security of any nation lies not solely or even primarily in its military capability, but equally in developing relatively stable patterns of economic and political growth. National security has also been defined in terms of capacity to achieve reconciliation among diverse groups in the society. (Nabon 2012: Nweze 2004). Laid credence to the indices of states national security; which includes preservation, protection and guarantee of the safety of life, property, wealth of the citizenry and measures to guard against threat to national sovereignty. Therefore, every aspect of the society is saddled with the responsibility to promote security. Hence, the nation's security is the concerns of the state institutions as well as individuals, associations, political parties amongst others. This is why (Reilly, 2001) advocated an amalgamated measure enhanced by states, aimed at achieving mutual survival, coexistence and safety within and outside the state. The concept entails that all segments of the society are responsible in ensuring that security is achieved in the political system. National security is therefore, an all-encompassing condition in which citizens can live in freedom, peace and safety; participate fully in the process of governance, enjoy the protection of fundamental human rights; have access to resources and necessities of life; and inhabit an environment which is conducive to their health and well-being. Although total security is rarely possible, but it must be noted that Nigerians deserve a strong nation with her fundamental values intact and her institutions and people secure. Part of the means for achieving these, all efforts must be geared towards the protection of values, independence of both territorial and consciousness and projects good humanity in the political system.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper deploys the Elite theory in explaining the core essence of the study. To this end (Varma, 2007) argued that the elite theory is a sociology, political science and philosophy theory which infer the idea that power in society is held by a small number of individuals, who are assumed to occupy the upper strata of the society. These few individuals often have easy access to more resources than other. As a result

of their status they have control over key decision-making, as well as maintain power hegemony in the political system. These include politics, economy, Education, media etc. (Chilcote 1994) argued that the elite theory focuses on the inevitable group of the powerful in all large-scale societies.

This definition implies that, political systems are stratified basically into two. These are the ruling minority who with their small size are able to deploy their knowledge in ensuring authoritative allocation of scarce values in the political system they are also referred to as the dominant minority, the ruling class, political class, oligarchy, Aristocrats etc. on the other hand, there is the dominant majority or the masses, people, governed, citizens etc.

The elitists recognized the inputs of some philosophical ideas of Plato in the ancient Greek antiquity. In the 19th century, however, Vilfredo Pareto, Geotano Mosca and Robert Michel co-founded the elite theory as well as the Italian school of elitism.

According to (Iyoha, 1999) elite's theory holds that public policy reflects the value and preferences of the elites in every society. The elites therefore are those who occupy leading positions in the strategic aspect of the society, they wield power in the political system. Hence the elites usually project and protect their own interest and values as well as maintaining the status-quo of the elitist common interest, in the process of governance in the political system. Deriving from the character of the political elites in systems such as that of Nigeria, where the ruling elites are in the character of deceiving and manipulating public policies and programs to their own personal gain. No wonder the anti-corruption policies even with the best of intention it cannot work. This is simply because it is not to the interest of the elites; therefore, they will not support it and will do all that is necessary to thwart all efforts not minding the negative effect these actions portend for nation security

3.1 Gap/Contribution to Knowledge

There has been insufficient focus on the direct linkage between corruption and specific national security outcomes in previous study. Most studies discuss corruption's broad negative impacts but do not thoroughly analyze the mechanisms by which corruption directly undermines institutions critical for security, such as the police, judiciary, and military.

Also, there has been lack of integrated approaches combining corruption and socio-economic factors as joint drivers of insecurity. Many works treat

corruption in isolation rather than exploring its interplay with poverty, inequality, and political instability as a compounded threat to national security.

This study fills these gaps by:

- Providing detailed empirical evidence on how corruption weakens institutional effectiveness and fosters impunity, thus directly compromising national security.
- Adopting a comprehensive framework that includes socio-economic and political dimensions alongside corruption to offer richer insights into the multifaceted challenges to Nigeria's security.
- Addressing these gaps, the study contributes to the body of knowledge by deepening understanding of corruption's complex role in national insecurity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and informing targeted anti-corruption and security policies.

4. Corruption Influence on Security Institutions in Nigeria

Corruption has severely compromised the effectiveness of security institutions in Nigeria, profoundly undermining the country's national security framework. According to research, corruption weakens key security agencies such as the police, military, and judiciary by diverting resources meant for personnel, equipment, and operations into private hands (Ogundiya, 2010). This embezzlement and bribery lead to poorly equipped and demoralized forces, unable to effectively combat insurgency, terrorism, and organized crime. Additionally, nepotism and favoritism in recruitment and promotion practices within these agencies reduce the overall competence and professionalism of security personnel, exacerbating operational inefficiencies (Alimi & Isiramen, 2016). This systemic corruption fosters a culture of impunity where criminals exploit gaps in governance to perpetuate insecurity, further destabilizing the nation.

Moreover, corruption perpetuates insecurity by eroding public trust in security institutions. Citizens grow disillusioned with forces perceived as corrupt and ineffective, leading to reduced cooperation in intelligence gathering and community policing efforts essential for crime prevention. Cases such as the mismanagement of military allowances and embezzlement of defense funds have been well documented, where officials prioritize personal gains over national interest, thereby weakening Nigeria's ability to respond to internal threats (Taiwo, 2009;

Transparency International, 2024). This distrust also deters international support and investment, compounding the country's security challenges. Corruption within the defense procurement and budgeting processes leads to financial misappropriation, limiting funds available for critical security infrastructure and training while emboldening criminal networks and insurgent groups (CISLAC, 2024).

The pervasive influence of corruption in Nigeria's security institutions manifests in a vicious cycle where weak institutions enable corruption, and corruption undermines institutional effectiveness. Anti-corruption efforts focusing on transparency, accountability, and civilian oversight remain imperative to breaking this cycle (Aghayere & Alimi, 2009). Without addressing corruption within the security sector, Nigeria's national security will continue to be compromised, impeding sustainable peace and development. Therefore, this discussion highlights the urgent need for comprehensive reforms that strengthen institutional integrity, improve resource management, and rebuild public trust to bolster Nigeria's security architecture.

5. How Corruption Exacerbate Insecurity and Social Disorder in Nigeria

Corruption exacerbates insecurity and social disorder in Nigeria by significantly undermining the rule of law and the state's capacity to provide basic security and economic well-being for its citizens. Corrupt practices within government institutions lead to the misallocation of resources, especially those earmarked for security services, health, education, and infrastructure, creating widespread poverty and inequality, which are root causes of social unrest (Aribatise, 2025). The mismanagement of public funds limits access to social amenities and employment opportunities, increasing the vulnerability of the population to criminal activities, insurgency, and violent conflicts. This creates a vicious cycle where insecurity fuels corruption, and corruption, in turn, deepens insecurity and social disintegration (Akindoyin & Badru, 2025).

Furthermore, corruption within the security sector erodes public trust and cooperation, which are critical for effective community security and intelligence gathering essential to curbing violence and crime. When citizens perceive law enforcement and security institutions as corrupt, unreliable, or complicit in criminal activities, they become reluctant to report crimes or collaborate with these institutions, thereby weakening preventive and responsive mechanisms

(Adamaagashi et al., 2023). Incidents of bribery, extortion, and illegal practices within the police and military discourage lawful behavior and foster a culture of impunity among criminals, insurgents, and armed gangs. This breakdown of social order and institutional integrity creates an atmosphere where insecurity thrives, giving rise to kidnappings, banditry, terrorism, and communal clashes frequently witnessed in various parts of Nigeria (Oghuvbu & Oghuvbu, 2020).

The socio-political consequences of corruption-driven insecurity also undermine Nigeria's democratic consolidation and development efforts. Corruption compromises governance quality, weakening political institutions and impeding fair resource distribution, which aggravates regional and ethnic tensions. As a result, communities experience heightened mistrust, inter-group conflicts, and resistance to state authority, creating fertile grounds for insurgent recruitment and violent extremism (Jimoh, 2025). Tackling this challenge requires comprehensive anti-corruption measures integrated with social reforms to address economic deprivation, strengthen institutional accountability, and rebuild public confidence. Only through eradicating corruption and enhancing good governance can Nigeria achieve sustainable security and social stability (Ebo, 2016; Odukoya & Osanaiye, 2017).

6. Policy Interventions to Effectively Curb Corruption and Improve National Security Outcomes in Nigeria

Effective policy interventions to curb corruption and improve national security outcomes in Nigeria require a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy that addresses both preventive and enforcement dimensions. The recent National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2022–2026 reflects Nigeria's commitment to combat corruption systematically, aiming to strengthen governance and institutional integrity (UNCAC Coalition, 2024). Key among the preventive measures is the establishment of autonomous anti-corruption bodies such as the Technical Unit on Governance and Anti-Corruption Reforms (TUGAR), which coordinates and monitors anti-corruption efforts across federal and sub-national levels. These agencies play a crucial role in data collection, policy evaluation, and fostering public awareness. However, challenges such as limited structural independence of agencies and low awareness at local government levels hinder optimal implementation, necessitating reforms that empower anti-corruption bodies with greater autonomy and enhance civic engagement

(Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission [ICPC], 2024).

Enforcement mechanisms must be buttressed by legislative and institutional reforms that ensure timely prosecution and asset recovery while protecting whistleblowers who expose corrupt practices. Progressive legal frameworks like the Money Laundering Act and the autonomy granted to the Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) have strengthened the country's capacity to trace and repatriate stolen assets. Despite successes such as asset recovery related to the Abacha loot, the absence of comprehensive whistleblowing protections and accountability gaps in asset management undermine citizens' confidence and the deterrence effect of anti-corruption laws (UNCAC Coalition, 2024). Strengthening judicial independence and enhancing collaboration between anti-corruption agencies, law enforcement, and the judiciary are imperative for effective criminal justice responses, reducing corruption within security institutions, and restoring public trust in national security architectures (State House Nigeria, 2025).

Ultimately, integrating anti-corruption reforms with technological innovations, transparency measures, and community participation can significantly improve national security outcomes. Initiatives focused on digital procurement systems, real-time monitoring, and transparent public financial management reduce opportunities for rent-seeking behavior and increase accountability. Additionally, fostering partnerships with civil society organizations and the private sector to promote transparency and report corruption empowers citizens and amplifies collective accountability. Nigeria's anti-corruption agenda must also emphasize socio-economic reforms that address poverty and inequality, which are often exploited by corrupt networks to perpetuate insecurity. These holistic interventions, aligned with international best practices and sustained political will, have the potential to dismantle patronage networks, enhance institutional effectiveness, and create a more secure and stable Nigeria (ICPC, 2024; UNCAC Coalition, 2024).

7. Conclusion

Corruption in governance has profoundly undermined national security in Nigeria's Fourth Republic by weakening institutional effectiveness, eroding the rule of law, and fostering socio-political instability. The pervasive nature of corruption across government agencies, law enforcement, and the judiciary has eroded public trust and compromised the ability of

security institutions to confront threats such as terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime. Diverted public resources and embezzlement have deprived critical sectors of the investments necessary for socio-economic development, exacerbating poverty, inequality, and social unrest that fuel insecurity. Corrupt practices have also enabled criminal networks to operate with impunity, further destabilizing the nation. The Nigeria experience illustrates that without robust anti-corruption measures aligned with comprehensive security reforms, national security remains fragile and vulnerable to multifaceted challenges. Addressing the intertwined problems of corruption and insecurity requires sustained political will, institutional strengthening, transparency, and public participation to restore governance, build social cohesion, and secure a peaceful and stable Nigeria

8. Recommendations

In view of the facts provided by this study, four salient recommendations are crucial to effectively combat corruption in governance and enhance national security in Nigeria's Fourth Republic:

First, there must be greater structural independence and empowerment of anti-corruption agencies, such as the Technical Unit on Governance and Anti-Corruption Reforms (TUGAR), ensuring autonomy from political interference and sufficient funding to enable robust and unbiased investigations and enforcement actions

Second, comprehensive whistleblower protection legislation should be enacted and implemented to safeguard citizens who expose corrupt practices, thereby fostering a culture of transparency and accountability across all levels of government

Third, transparency must be institutionalized in public procurement and financial management through digital platforms that allow real-time monitoring, reducing opportunities for corrupt rent-seeking and enhancing public oversight

Fourth, holistic anti-corruption reforms should integrate socio-economic development programs aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, which are often exploited by corrupt networks to perpetuate insecurity and social disorder

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