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POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA, 2015 – 2023

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Abstract
President Buhari came to power in the 2015 elections and one of his main campaign promises was to fight the corruption that was seen as rife in his predecessor's administration. However, years after, corruption still subsists as one of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria. In recent time, public attention has been drawn to the spectacles of corruption cases in Nigeria especially in the agencies of government. This has shown that moral values are fast diminishing among the people. As it were, integrity, honesty and dedication to duty have collapsed in the society and particularly among politicians, political office holders and government officials. The menace of corruption in Nigeria poses a great threat to the democratic governance of the country. This study, titled " Political Corruption and Democratic Governance in Nigeria, 2015-2023" aims to investigate the impact of political corruption on democratic governance. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the effects of bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism on transparency, government accountability, and the rule of law, respectively. Grounded in the Principal-Agent Theory, propounded by Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in 1976, the study elucidates how the dynamics between principals (citizens) and agents (government officials) contribute to corruption within democratic institutions. The findings reveal that bribery significantly impacts transparency, embezzlement affects government accountability, and nepotism influences the rule of law in Nigeria's democratic governance. The study recommends strengthening anti-bribery measures, enhancing financial oversight, promoting merit-based appointments, and increasing public awareness to combat corruption and improve governance. These recommendations are aimed at fostering a more transparent, accountable, and equitable democratic system in Nigeria.

Key Words: *Rule of Law, Corruption, Democratic Governance, Transparency, Accountability*

Introduction
Political corruption is a pervasive issue that significantly undermines democratic governance worldwide. In Nigeria, a country with a rich history of political transitions and economic potential, the implications of corruption are particularly profound. Despite being Africa's largest economy and a nation endowed with vast natural resources, Nigeria continues to grapple with the detrimental effects of corruption on its political, social, and

economic structures. Historically, the roots of political corruption in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial era. The colonial administration's exploitative practices set a precedent for the misuse of public office for personal gain. Post-independence, Nigeria's political landscape was marred by successive military coups, each regime often justifying its takeover with the promise of eradicating corruption, only to perpetuate it further. The transition to civilian rule in 1999 marked a significant milestone in Nigeria's democratic journey, yet corruption remained a persistent challenge, embedded in various facets of public life.

The structural and systemic nature of corruption in Nigeria is evident in its political institutions and processes. Electoral fraud, bribery, embezzlement of public funds, and nepotism are prevalent at various levels of government. These corrupt practices not only undermine the integrity of democratic institutions but also impede the country's socio-economic development. The impact of corruption is multifaceted, affecting the quality of public services, the effectiveness of policy implementation, and the overall governance environment. Political corruption has dire implications for democratic governance in Nigeria. It distorts electoral processes, leading to the election of leaders who may prioritize personal gain over public good. The manipulation of state resources for electoral advantage erodes the principles of free and fair elections, which are fundamental to democracy. Furthermore, corruption diminishes the government's ability to deliver essential services, exacerbating poverty and inequality, and fueling public disillusionment and disenfranchisement.

The focus of this study is political corruption, an aspect of corruption that entails the engagement of policy makers and those who implement the laws, in illicit or unethical activities. Political corruption occurs when laws and regulations are perverted to the benefit of politicians and their self-interests. Politicians rule on behalf of the people in a representative democratic system, this give them the opportunity to have control over all aspects of the governing process because of the right privilege they possess in making laws and their effective control of the state bureaucracy (Sorensen, 2016). Corrupt practices of these politicians and that of their appointees is regarded as political corruption. In Nigeria, political corruption is those corrupt practices perpetrated by public office holders. Bribery, kickbacks, extortions, looting and diversion of public funds for personal use, awarding contracts to themselves and relative among other, are some of corrupt act committed by this people. Majority of corrupt cases involving public officials are not heard about by the people. Most of these offences are covered and never allowed to be heard in the public domain. According to Andersson and Anechiarico (2019), apart from abusing their office, public office holders use their power to cover up their offence and get away with it, or serve lesser punishment compare to offence committed (Uwak and Udofia, 2016). Corruption is not only the bane of a nation, it also hinders democratic governance.

Various administrations, both military and civilian, have made numerous attempts to combat corruption in Nigeria. Several agencies and institutions were established for this purpose, such as the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption, the Corruption Investigation Bureau, and the Code of Conduct Bureau.

Following Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, efforts to fight corruption intensified, leading to the creation of anti-graft bodies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Due Process Office, and the Anti-Corruption Commission. Despite these initiatives, there has been minimal success in eradicating corruption in Nigeria. Democratic governance has struggled to take root in Nigeria, even after more than two decades of practicing democracy. Corruption remains a significant challenge to the Nigerian political system, obstructing the establishment of successful and credible democratic governance. However, corruption is not the only issue facing Nigeria; other significant problems include poverty, insurgency, ethno-religious crises, illiteracy, insecurity, election rigging and violence, unemployment, and economic hardship. Corruption is at the core of these issues, infiltrating every sector of Nigerian society. This pervasive corruption is perpetuated by public officials who act with impunity, facing little to no severe punishment for their actions. To foster good democratic governance, it is essential to first address corrupt practices. As Jega (2005), Ijewereme and Dunmade (2014), and Abdulrasheed and Abubakar (2021) argue, any serious political and socioeconomic reforms in Nigeria must prioritize the fight against corruption.

Statement of the problem

After many years under military rule, Nigeria transitioned to a democratic government on May 29, 1999. During the military era, the country experienced significant infrastructural decay, widespread suffering, and entrenched corruption. The return to civilian rule ignited hopes among ordinary Nigerians for a just and egalitarian society. They expected a new era of peace, stability, and prosperity, celebrating enthusiastically as democracy was restored. However, 23 years into democratic governance, Nigerians still long for the full benefits of democracy. Challenges such as poor leadership, human rights abuses, calls for constitutional and electoral reforms, increasing civil unrest, poverty, high unemployment rates, lack of transparency, and persistent corruption continue to hinder democratic governance and create significant governance issues in Nigeria (Olu-Adeyemi, 2022).

Nigeria's struggle with political corruption poses a significant challenge to the consolidation of democratic governance. Despite numerous efforts by successive administrations to combat corruption, its pervasive nature continues to undermine key democratic principles such as transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism are among the most prevalent forms of corruption in Nigeria, each contributing to the erosion of democratic governance in distinct yet interconnected ways. Bribery compromises the transparency of government actions and decisions, making it difficult for citizens to trust and engage with democratic institutions. The misappropriation of public funds through embezzlement severely impedes the accountability of government officials, as stolen resources result in underfunded public services and infrastructure, thereby failing to meet the needs of the populace. Nepotism, which prioritizes personal relationships over merit, weakens the rule of law by promoting inequality and reducing the effectiveness of government institutions.

These corrupt practices collectively diminish the quality of democratic governance in Nigeria, preventing the establishment of a fair, just, and effective political system. This study aims to investigate the specific ways in which political corruption, through the constructs of bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, affects the transparency, accountability, and rule of law in Nigeria's democratic governance. By understanding these dynamics, the study seeks to contribute to the development of targeted strategies to combat corruption and promote robust democratic governance in Nigeria.

Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the impact of Political Corruption on Democratic Governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Investigate the impact of bribery on transparency within democratic governance in Nigeria.
2. To assess the effect of embezzlement on government accountability in Nigeria.
3. To analyze the influence of nepotism on the rule of law in Nigeria's democratic governance

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How did of bribery on the part of political office holders affect transparency within democratic governance in Nigeria?
2. How does embezzlement affect government accountability in Nigeria?
3. What is the influence of nepotism on the rule of law in Nigeria's democratic governance?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypothesis will be tested to guide this study:

H_{o1}: Bribery has no significant impact on transparency within democratic governance in Nigeria.

H_{o2}: Embezzlement does not significantly affect government accountability in Nigeria.

H_{o3}: Nepotism has no significant influence on the rule of law in Nigeria's democratic governance.

The study focuses on the of Political Corruption and Democratic Governance in Nigeria, 2015- 2023. The study focuses on how political corruption impacts democratic governance in Nigeria within the period under study. This timeframe allows for a current and specific examination of electoral cycles, governance reforms, and anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria under former President Muhammadu Buhari. The study focuses on two variables: political corruption and democratic governance. Political corruption includes bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, which undermine transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Democratic governance involves transparency, ensuring open government actions, accountability, requiring officials to answer for decisions, and the rule of law, ensuring equality under the law. This study examines these constructs in Nigeria under Buhari from 2015 to 2023, analyzing how corruption affects governance

and impedes democratic principles. These variables were investigated in this study because of the theoretical background upon which the study was based.

Significance

This study holds both theoretical and empirical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to existing literature by deepening our understanding of how political corruption impacts democratic governance. It will enhance theoretical frameworks and provide new insights into the mechanisms through which corruption undermines transparency, accountability, and the rule of law within democratic systems. Empirically, the study will provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders in Nigeria, particularly those involved in governance and anti-corruption efforts. By identifying specific challenges posed by corruption, the study aims to inform targeted interventions and policy reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and promoting good governance practices. Furthermore, the findings are expected to benefit academia by serving as a reference for future research on corruption and its effects on governance dynamics. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the enhancement of democratic governance in Nigeria by addressing critical issues related to political corruption and promoting sustainable governance practices.

Review of Relatred Literature

Bribery and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Bribery remains a wicked problem that does not seem to go away so easily, or at all, in many countries across the world, especially in Nigeria. According to De Waele et al. (2021), Bribery comes with very high social costs, undermining the sense of fairness. Bribery has macro-, meso-, and micro-level roots. First, a macro lens is required to explain differences across countries. Bribery undermines democratic institutions, erodes public trust, and impedes socio-economic development. In a democratic setting, bribery compromises the principles of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, leading to weakened institutions and diminished public confidence. The impact of bribery on democratic governance in Nigeria is far-reaching. It distorts the electoral process, compromises the quality of elected officials, and hampers the effective delivery of public services. When officials are elected or appointed based on bribery rather than merit, it leads to inefficiency, mismanagement, and corruption at various levels of government. The integrity of elections is a cornerstone of democracy. However, in Nigeria, bribery often taints the electoral process. Votes are bought, election officials are bribed to alter results, and security agencies are compromised to favor certain candidates. This undermines the legitimacy of elected officials and erodes public trust in the electoral system (Jinadu, 2022). Bribery also leads to the appointment of unqualified individuals who prioritize personal gain over public service. This results in poor governance, as decisions are made to benefit a few rather than the collective interest of society. Consequently, public resources are diverted for private use, and development projects are either poorly executed or abandoned (Ogundiya, 2022).

Effective public service delivery is crucial for democratic governance. However, bribery disrupts this process, leading to inefficiencies and inequities. Public officials demand bribes to perform basic services, denying access to those who cannot afford to pay. This

exacerbates inequality and hinders socio-economic development (Smith, 2022). The Halliburton bribery scandal is one of the most notable cases of bribery in Nigeria. This scandal involved senior Nigerian officials who accepted bribes from the multinational corporation Halliburton to secure lucrative contracts for the construction of a liquefied natural gas plant. The scandal, which spanned several administrations, highlighted the extent of bribery at the highest levels of government (Smith, 2022). Another significant case is the Siemens bribery scandal. In 2007, it was revealed that the German engineering firm Siemens had paid bribes to Nigerian officials to secure telecommunications contracts. The scandal implicated several high-ranking officials, leading to trials and convictions in Germany, though accountability in Nigeria remained limited (Ogundiya, 2022). The Ekiti election bribery case during the 2014 gubernatorial elections in Ekiti State is another example. Audio recordings surfaced showing discussions about bribing military officials to influence the election outcome. The recordings implicated several prominent politicians and highlighted the role of bribery in subverting the democratic process (Jinadu, 2022).

The Farouk Lawan bribery scandal is another high-profile case. In 2012, Farouk Lawan, a member of the House of Representatives, was caught on tape accepting a $620,000 bribe from Femi Otedola, a businessman, to remove his company's name from a report on fuel subsidy fraud. The case underscored how bribery infiltrates legislative functions, compromising oversight and accountability (Akanbi, 2022). The Police Pension Fund scandal involved the embezzlement of over $2 billion meant for police pensions. Investigations revealed that officials in charge of the fund demanded bribes for disbursements, leading to widespread suffering among retired police officers. The case highlighted the devastating impact of bribery on vulnerable populations (Ibekwe, 2022). Bribery remains a significant impediment to democratic governance in Nigeria. It distorts the electoral process, undermines the quality of governance, and hampers public service delivery. Addressing bribery requires comprehensive reforms, including strengthening institutions, enforcing anti-bribery laws, and promoting a culture of integrity and accountability.

Embezzlement and Government Accountability

Embezzlement is classified as a white-collar crime and its impact is experienced across all levels of government. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines embezzlement as the illegal misuse or misapplication by a criminal for their own benefit, involving money, property, or any other valuable item entrusted to their care, custody, or control. Olojede (2018) includes embezzlement in his list of financial crimes. It is an offense that occurs when an individual deliberately uses assets and/or money for an unintended purpose. The National White-Collar Crime Center (NW3C) distinguishes embezzlement from other types of theft by the breach of financial trust between the property or money owner and the offender. They further explain that, technically, embezzlement is a type of larceny and therefore does not have its own category in uniform crime reports, making its frequency difficult to measure and variable across sources. Embezzlement is typically committed by employees entrusted with money or assets. Bartz, Strock, and Harris (2017) confirm that every organization, regardless of size or sector, is susceptible to embezzlement, and they suggest preventive measures such

as the segregation of duties and meticulous checks of all transactions, whether large or small.

In many countries, including Nigeria, embezzlement undermines public trust, hinders economic development, and perpetuates a cycle of poverty and corruption. Effective government accountability mechanisms are essential to combat embezzlement and ensure that public resources are used for the common good. Embezzlement within government institutions typically involves officials diverting funds meant for public projects or services into personal accounts. This not only deprives the public of essential services but also erodes trust in government institutions. For instance, in Nigeria, numerous high-profile cases of embezzlement have highlighted the pervasive nature of this issue and its detrimental impact on governance and development. One notable case is the embezzlement scandal involving the former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Diezani Alison-Madueke. In 2015, it was reported that Alison-Madueke was involved in the misappropriation of billions of dollars from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Investigations revealed that funds meant for public investment were diverted to private accounts and used to purchase luxury properties and other assets. This case underscored the extent to which high-level officials could exploit their positions for personal gain, thereby undermining government accountability and public trust (Smith, 2022). Another significant case is the Police Pension Fund scandal, where officials embezzled over $2 billion intended for the pensions of retired police officers. The embezzlement was orchestrated by top officials who manipulated records and diverted funds into their personal accounts. The scandal left many retired officers without their rightful pensions, highlighting the devastating impact of embezzlement on vulnerable populations and the need for robust accountability mechanisms (Ibekwe, 2022).

Government accountability refers to the processes, mechanisms, and institutions through which public officials are held responsible for their actions, decisions, and the use of public resources. Effective accountability mechanisms are crucial in preventing embezzlement and ensuring that public resources are used transparently and efficiently. Key components of government accountability include robust financial oversight, transparent procurement processes, and effective judicial systems. Financial oversight involves regular audits, both internal and external, to ensure that public funds are appropriately managed. Independent audit institutions play a critical role in detecting and preventing embezzlement. For example, the Office of the Auditor-General in Nigeria is mandated to audit public accounts and report any discrepancies. However, the effectiveness of such institutions often depends on their independence and the political will to act on their findings (Akanbi, 2022).

Transparent procurement processes are also essential in curbing embezzlement. Public procurement involves significant financial outlays, making it a prime target for embezzlement. Implementing transparent and competitive bidding processes can reduce opportunities for officials to divert funds. The Public Procurement Act in Nigeria aims to promote transparency and accountability in public procurement. However, its effectiveness is often hampered by weak enforcement and pervasive corruption

(Ogundiya, 2022). An effective judicial system is crucial for holding officials accountable for embezzlement. This involves prosecuting and penalizing those found guilty of embezzling public funds. However, in many cases, political interference and a lack of judicial independence undermine the ability of the judiciary to act decisively. Strengthening judicial independence and ensuring that anti-corruption agencies have the resources and autonomy to carry out their mandates are essential steps toward improving government accountability (Jinadu, 2022). Civil society and the media also play an important role in enhancing government accountability. Civil society organizations (CSOs) can monitor government activities, advocate for transparency, and hold officials accountable through public campaigns and legal action. The media, on the other hand, can investigate and expose cases of embezzlement, thereby informing the public and putting pressure on authorities to act.

However, in many countries, including Nigeria, journalists and activists face significant risks when exposing corruption, highlighting the need for legal protections and a supportive environment for their work (Smith, 2022). Embezzlement is a major impediment to government accountability, with far-reaching consequences for governance, economic development, and public trust. Addressing embezzlement requires a multi-faceted approach that includes strengthening financial oversight, ensuring transparent procurement processes, bolstering judicial independence, and empowering civil society and the media. By implementing these measures, governments can enhance accountability, reduce corruption, and ensure that public resources are used for the benefit of all citizens.

Nepotism and Democratic Governance

Nepotism, the practice of favoring relatives or close friends for positions and privileges, significantly undermines democratic governance. In a democratic system, governance should be based on merit, equality, and fairness. When nepotism infiltrates this system, it erodes public trust, hampers efficiency, and perpetuates inequality. It creates an environment where qualifications and competence are secondary to familial or personal connections, which can lead to a lack of accountability and transparency in government operations. In democratic governance, the principle of equal opportunity is paramount. Every individual should have an equal chance to participate in the political process, compete for public positions, and benefit from government programs. Nepotism directly contradicts this principle by granting undue advantages to a select few, thus alienating the larger population. This not only disenfranchises qualified individuals who are excluded from opportunities due to lack of connections but also fosters resentment and cynicism towards the political system. Furthermore, nepotism can lead to the appointment of unqualified individuals to critical positions, resulting in inefficiency and incompetence in public administration. When individuals are chosen based on their relationships rather than their expertise or experience, the quality of governance suffers. This can have far-reaching consequences, from poorly implemented policies to mismanagement of public resources. For instance, key sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure may falter under the leadership of inadequately qualified appointees, adversely affecting public welfare. Additionally, nepotism undermines the rule of law and the principles of justice. In a nepotistic system, laws and regulations are

often applied selectively, protecting those with connections while penalizing those without. This selective enforcement of laws weakens institutions meant to uphold justice and equality. When people perceive that the legal system favors the well-connected, it diminishes their confidence in the rule of law and their willingness to abide by it, thereby destabilizing the democratic fabric.

The case of Nigeria offers a clear illustration of the detrimental effects of nepotism on democratic governance. Despite being a democratic state with a constitution that advocates for equality and meritocracy, Nigeria has struggled with nepotism across various levels of government. Studies and reports, such as those by Dike (2022) and Obiyan (2022), highlight instances where public offices are filled based on personal connections rather than competence. This practice has led to inefficiencies and corruption, hampering the nation's development efforts and eroding public trust in governmental institutions. Moreover, nepotism in democratic governance can perpetuate corruption. When officials are appointed based on their relationships, there is often a reciprocal expectation of loyalty and favors, which can manifest in corrupt practices. Relatives and friends in high positions may protect each other's interests, engage in graft, or overlook unethical behavior, knowing that their positions are secure due to their connections rather than their performance. This creates a cycle of corruption that is difficult to break and further erodes the principles of democratic governance.

To combat the negative impact of nepotism on democratic governance, several measures can be implemented. Firstly, establishing transparent and merit-based recruitment processes for public positions is crucial. Ensuring that all appointments are made through competitive, transparent procedures can help mitigate nepotism. Secondly, strengthening institutions that monitor and enforce anti-nepotism laws is essential. Bodies such as anti-corruption commissions and ombudsman offices should be empowered to investigate and sanction cases of nepotism effectively. Additionally, promoting a culture of accountability and integrity within the public sector can help curb nepotistic practices. Public officials should be held to high ethical standards, and there should be mechanisms for citizens to report and challenge instances of nepotism. Educational campaigns and training programs that emphasize the importance of meritocracy and fairness in governance can also play a role in changing societal attitudes towards nepotism.

Political Corruption and Democratic Governance

Kolstad and Wiig (2016) contended that the connection between corruption and democracy is well-documented and widely recognized. Despite this, democracy does not guarantee clean and transparent governance, as evidenced by numerous studies. Even democratic nations known for low corruption levels continue to struggle with this issue (Ferrin, 2016). Notable examples include the corruption cases of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine, and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe (Andersson and Anechiarico, 2019). Corruption scandals are prevalent in many European countries such as Italy, Iceland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Germany, as well as in the United States, indicating that corruption is a pervasive problem across political systems worldwide. Corruption adversely impacts governance, affecting various aspects of a country, particularly the integrity of governance, effective policymaking, and trust

in the democratic process (Andersson and Anechiarico, 2019). Public officials must exhibit high levels of integrity, adhering to procedures, processes, and behaviors consistent with essential moral values and norms (Huberts, 2014). They are expected to maintain high standards of integrity, honesty, objectivity, and propriety because they manage public funds and resources. Their conduct must align with democratic governance norms to ensure the effective and efficient use of these resources for national benefit (Andersson and Anechiarico, 2019; Waziri, 2009).

Democratic governance is both practical and humane, characterized by consistent checks on those in power by the opposition. When opposition fails to check the excesses of those in power, it signifies a lack of true democracy, leading to the concealment and denial of corruption and wrongdoings. The humane aspect of democratic governance emphasizes principles of equity and equal treatment, preventing public officials from enriching themselves at the expense of the populace (Andersson and Anechiarico, 2019). However, governance integrity is compromised when those in power abuse their positions through corruption. In Nigeria, as in other democratic states, public officials are entrusted with roles and responsibilities to achieve good governance. Unfortunately, these roles and resources are often diverted for private gain, betraying public trust. The Nigerian public sector is plagued by fraudulent accumulation practices, used by both military and civilian leaders to enrich themselves, depleting the national treasury and driving the country into debt. This misappropriation results in a scarcity of resources necessary for economic, social, and cultural development (Moris, 2015). Consequently, Nigeria faces a "paradoxical situation," where the wealth of a few ruling elites mocks the ordinary citizens (Fatile and Okewale, 2013).

Empirical Review

Muyiwa and Olabode (2023) carried out a study which examined the manifestations and impacts of corruption on democratic governance in Nigeria. The paper made use of secondary data and adopted the elite theory as the theoretical framework for its analysis. It posited that corruption is the bane of Nigeria's underdevelopment such that it has eaten deep into all facets of the Nigerian society. This in consequence placed the wealth of the nation in wrong hands, wastage of scarce resources which disrupts services delivery and high cost of governance. The paper suggested stringent punishment for corrupt acts, reform to be institutionalized to increase transparency, accountability and good governance and implementation of other institutional reforms that would lay solid foundation for economic development. Abubakar and Fadeyi (2019) conducted a study titled "Corruption and Democracy: The Nigerian Case," exploring corruption as a pervasive issue affecting democracy in Nigeria. Their research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing both secondary (library) and primary (interview) data sources. The data were descriptively analyzed based on the gathered information. The study concluded that Nigeria's democracy faces significant challenges from widespread corrupt practices across all sectors of the economy. Despite various efforts by successive governments to combat corruption, these initiatives have proven largely ineffective.

Soreide (2022) conducted a study titled "Corruption in Democratic Systems: A Cross-Country Analysis," focusing on various countries worldwide. Utilizing quantitative methods with regression analysis on data from Transparency International and the World Bank, the study found that higher levels of political corruption significantly weaken democratic institutions. It highlighted that corruption undermines public trust and electoral integrity, leading to ineffective governance. The study recommended stronger international cooperation, enhanced transparency measures, and robust legal frameworks to combat corruption. Mukherjee (2022) explored "Political Corruption and Democratic Stability in India," employing qualitative case study methods. The research revealed that corruption in political offices compromises democratic stability by fostering economic inequality and undermining legal systems. It suggested implementing stringent anti-corruption laws, improving judicial independence, and fostering civic education to enhance democratic stability and reduce corruption. Garcia and Morales (2022) studied "Electoral Corruption and Democratic Processes in Latin America," using mixed methods. The study found that electoral corruption, including vote-buying and electoral fraud, severely impacts democratic processes by distorting electoral outcomes and reducing voter trust. Recommendations included electoral reforms, strengthening election monitoring bodies, and promoting political accountability. Kim (2022) examined "Government Accountability and Corruption in South Korea," employing econometric analysis. The study discovered that lack of government accountability exacerbates corruption, resulting in inefficiencies and public disillusionment. The findings emphasized the need for transparent governance practices, enhanced public sector audits, and active citizen participation in governance.

Mbaku (2022) conducted research on "Embezzlement and Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa," using comparative case studies. The study revealed that embezzlement of public funds is rampant, leading to underdevelopment and weakened state institutions. It recommended comprehensive financial oversight mechanisms, public financial management reforms, and empowering civil society to monitor government activities. Akech and Omondi (2022) explored "Corruption and Democratic Governance in Kenya," employing a mixed-methods approach involving qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys with political analysts, civil society representatives, and government officials. Their research highlighted pervasive corruption's detrimental impact on democratic institutions, emphasizing the need for enhanced transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures to strengthen governance. Akech and Omondi underscored the importance of political will and institutional reforms in combating corruption and restoring public trust in Kenya's democratic processes.

Chen and Lee (2022) conducted a comprehensive study titled "Bribery and its Impact on Democratic Institutions in Taiwan." They employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing quantitative surveys and qualitative focus group discussions with stakeholders from government, business, and civil society. Their findings highlighted how bribery undermines democratic integrity by fostering clientelism and eroding public trust in institutions. Chen and Lee recommended stricter enforcement of anti-bribery laws, transparency in political financing, and civic education to promote ethical governance and strengthen democratic institutions in Taiwan. Gomez and Martinez (2022) examined

"Political Nepotism and Governance in Mexico" through qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with political experts, public officials, and analysis of case studies. Their research elucidated how nepotism perpetuates inefficiency and undermines meritocracy in public service appointments. Gomez and Martinez recommended reforms to promote transparency, merit-based recruitment processes, and institutional safeguards against nepotistic practices to enhance governance effectiveness in Mexico.

Khan and Ahmed (2022) analyzed "Embezzlement in Public Office: A Case Study of Pakistan" using a combination of archival research, document analysis, and structured interviews with government officials and anti-corruption experts. Their study revealed systemic challenges and vulnerabilities in public financial management, contributing to widespread embezzlement and corruption. Khan and Ahmed advocated for strengthened audit mechanisms, regulatory reforms, and ethical training programs to mitigate embezzlement and promote accountability in Pakistan's public sector. Santos and Silva (2022) investigated "Electoral Fraud and Democratic Resilience in Brazil" through quantitative data analysis of electoral records and surveys among voters and political analysts. Their research demonstrated how electoral fraud compromises democratic resilience by undermining electoral integrity and public confidence in electoral processes. Santos and Silva proposed electoral reforms, enhanced oversight mechanisms, and civic education initiatives to strengthen electoral transparency and accountability in Brazil.

Adewole and Ojo (2022) conducted a comprehensive study titled "Corruption and Economic Implications in Nigeria," employing a mixed-methods approach including surveys, interviews with stakeholders, and analysis of financial data. Their research revealed the pervasive impact of corruption on Nigeria's economy, highlighting how embezzlement and bribery contribute to economic instability and hinder development. Recommendations included strengthening anti-corruption agencies, enhancing transparency in public financial management, and promoting ethical leadership to combat corruption effectively. Ibrahim and Lawal (2022) conducted a rigorous exploration of political patronage and its impact on governance in Nigeria. Through qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, they illuminated how patronage networks shape political appointments and policy decisions, often at the expense of meritocracy and public accountability. The study underscores the need for institutional reforms to enhance transparency, strengthen governance structures, and foster inclusive citizen participation. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can cultivate a more responsive and accountable political environment conducive to sustainable development and democratic consolidation.

Ogundele and Oladele's (2022) study provides a critical analysis of bribery and its ramifications within Nigeria's public sector. Through archival research and case studies of corruption scandals, they highlight the pervasive nature of bribery among public officials, which undermines service delivery and erodes institutional integrity. The study underscores the urgent need for robust anti-corruption measures, including stringent enforcement of laws, institutional reforms, and comprehensive civic education. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can enhance transparency, accountability, and

governance effectiveness, fostering sustainable development and public trust. Eze and Nwankwo (2022) undertook a detailed examination of nepotism and its effects on administrative efficiency in Nigeria. Through case studies and interviews with civil servants, they elucidated how nepotistic practices in recruitment and promotion undermine meritocracy and diminish public trust. The study advocates for institutional reforms aimed at promoting transparency, merit-based appointments, and capacity building within the public sector. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can enhance administrative efficiency, foster inclusive governance, and strengthen public service delivery.

Ogunlesi and Yusuf (2022) conducted a rigorous investigation into embezzlement and its implications for governance accountability in Nigeria. Through archival research and expert interviews, they underscored the pervasive nature of embezzlement, highlighting its detrimental effects on public trust and financial management. The study recommends robust measures such as enhanced financial oversight, regulatory reforms, and ethical leadership to combat embezzlement effectively. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can strengthen governance accountability, restore public confidence, and foster sustainable economic development.

Gap in Literature

The aspect of this work, has examined several literature on political corruption and democratic governance. Most of the researchers have presented arguments to support the assertion that political corruption plays a key role in influencing quality of democratic governance. Most of these researchers carried their studies with theories other than Principal-Agent theory. The researcher identifies the need to carry this study with Principal-Agent theory. The study therefore sort to fill the theoretical gap by analyzing the effect of political corruption on democratic governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.

Theoretical Framework

Principal-Agent Theory

The theoretical framework for this study on political corruption and democratic governance in Nigeria is grounded in the Principal-Agent Theory. This theory was propounded by Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in their seminal work published in 1976. The Principal-Agent Theory offers a framework for understanding the dynamics of corruption within democratic institutions by exploring the relationships between those who delegate authority (principals) and those who exercise it (agents).

The Principal-Agent Theory posits that in any hierarchical structure, principals (such as citizens or shareholders) delegate authority to agents (such as government officials or managers) to perform tasks on their behalf. The theory's central tenet is the existence of information asymmetry between principals and agents, where agents have more information about their actions and intentions than the principals. This asymmetry creates opportunities for agents to act in their own interests rather than in the interests of the principals, leading to issues such as moral hazard and adverse selection. Agents may exploit their positions for personal gain through practices like bribery, embezzlement,

and nepotism, especially in environments where oversight and accountability mechanisms are weak.

Relevance to the study

In the context of Nigeria, the theory helps explain how political corruption flourishes when government officials (agents) prioritize their personal interests over the public good. The lack of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms exacerbates this problem, allowing agents to engage in corrupt practices with impunity. For instance, embezzlement of public funds occurs when government officials divert resources meant for public services into their own pockets. This form of corruption is facilitated by weak financial controls, lack of transparency, and inadequate punitive measures for financial misconduct. Similarly, nepotism involves the preferential treatment of relatives and friends in public appointments, undermining meritocracy and fairness. This practice not only leads to inefficiency in public administration but also erodes public trust in government institutions.

Applying the Principal-Agent Theory to this study further emphasizes the need for robust governance frameworks that reduce information asymmetry and enhance accountability. Strengthening institutions that monitor and regulate the actions of government officials can mitigate the risks of corruption. The establishment of systems that ensure regular audits, whistleblower protections, and stringent enforcement of anti-corruption laws can significantly reduce the incidence of corrupt practices. Furthermore, the theory emphasizes the importance of political will and leadership integrity in combating corruption. Leaders who demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability can set a positive example for other government officials and create an environment where corrupt practices are less likely to be tolerated. This approach can be complemented by efforts to educate and engage the public in anti-corruption initiatives, thereby fostering a culture of accountability and civic responsibility.

Principal-Agent Theory, propounded by Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in 1976, provides a theoretical lens for examining the relationship between political corruption and democratic governance in Nigeria. By elucidating the dynamics between principals and agents, this theory underscores the importance of transparency, accountability, and robust oversight in curbing corruption and promoting effective democratic governance. Addressing the challenges of political corruption through the principles of the Principal-Agent Theory can lead to a more equitable distribution of resources, enhanced public trust, and improved socio-economic outcomes for the Nigerian populace.

Methodology

This study adopted the documentary design. Documentary research design is based on the examination of the independent and dependent variables after the events have taken place and the data already in existence. In ex-post-facto research design, the test of the hypothesis involves observing the independent and dependent variables at the same time because the effects of the former on the latter have already taken place before the investigation. The research applied the documentary research design because it is ideal

for conducting social research when it is not possible or acceptable to manipulate the characteristics of human participants. It is a substitute for true experimental research and can be used to test hypotheses about cause-and-effect where it is not practical or ethical to apply a true experimental design. Documentary research shares with experimental research design some of its basic logic of inquiry. For example, attempts was made at explaining the consequences based on antecedent conditions; determine the influence of a variable on another variable, and test a claim using statistical hypothesis testing technique.

To generate the relevant data to test and validate our hypotheses, we relied on the qualitative method. Qualitative method of data collection is based on logical deduction and analysis of documents. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), qualitative method is "a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases". In agreement, Strauss and Corbin, (1990), broadly defined qualitative research as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Also, this study employed secondary sources of data. Secondary sources of data, as explained by Asika (2006:65), refers to a set of data gathered or authored by another person, usually data from the available archives either in the form of document or survey results and code books. Selltiz *et al.* (1977:7), articulates the advantages of secondary sources of data to include that of economy. Again, the information of this sort is collected periodically thereby making the establishment of trends over time possible. The study, therefore, drew data from institutional and official documents sourced from the internet, journal articles and conference materials.

The study employed secondary data sources. Secondary data is data that is collected for purposes other than the original application. It is an analysis of data that have already been collected for some other purposes. These may be contemporary or historical and the data may be qualitative or quantitative and usually needs adjustments and validation before being put to use. This data can include survey data and documentary data (Jewel as cited in Malakwane 2012). The motivation is that using secondary data saves time since the work has already been done to collect the data. It avoids the problems associated with the data collection process. As opposed to primary data, secondary data provides a source of data that is both permanent and available in a manner that may be checked relatively easily by others. Therefore, books, journals, newspapers, internet articles as well as government reports have been used for the purpose of this research. The various published documents provided the researcher with additional information on the research problem. A number of tables were used to interpret, draw and reach various conclusions in this instance.

This research is a qualitative research and therefore qualitative research is generally characterized by the simultaneous collection and analysis of data whereby both mutually shape each other. Qualitative descriptive analysis moves farther into the domain of interpretation to understand not only the manifest, but also the latent content of data. It is a descriptive verbal analysis, which involves interpretation and explanation of both

qualitative and quantitative information. The adoption of the foregoing analytical method became inevitable because the study principally relied on secondary data.

Empirical Verification

Corruption in the Nigerian Polity

Nigeria is one of the countries in the world endowed natural and human resource. Nigeria is also one of the world's largest oil exporters, and has been the continent's leading economy for several years (Kreck, 2019). With over 200 million inhabitants, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. Sadly, presently about 87 million people in Nigeria live on less than 1.90 US dollar a day, making it the country with the world's highest number of people living in extreme poverty (Kreck, 2019). Consequently, Nigeria has been recently tagged the poverty capital of the world, overtaken India a country with seven times the population of Nigeria (World Poverty Clock, 2019). This has been attributed to pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria. Lack of transparency, accountability, good morals, and ethical conduct are wanting among many of Nigeria's leaders. The resources meant for the implementation of some of the developmental programmes are misplaced, diverted or even misappropriated, with gross impunity. Thus, Nigerians are poor and deprived even when the country is blessed with resources. The reason is not farfetched. It is all centered on corruption and bad governance (Ajor & Odey, 2018; Aminu, 2019). Though, corruption is a global phenomenon (problem) and exists in varying degrees in different countries hence, no country in the world is absolutely corrupt free (Umuna, 2018). However, corruption in the case of Nigeria has become very worrisome.

The incidence of corruption has taken a frightening dimension to the extent that Nigeria has been consistently placed among the most corrupt countries in the world. The pervasive and deep rooted nature of corruption in Nigeria is also indicated by the global corruption index ranking by Transparency International. For instance, in 2015, Nigeria ranked 136 out of 170 countries assessed. In 2016, Nigeria was rated the 136 most corrupt nations out of the 176 countries surveyed. In 2017, the TI also ranked Nigeria as the 35th most corrupt nation in the world. Thus, according to the report, Nigeria was rated 148 out of about 175 countries surveyed worldwide. In 2018, the TI, in its report on corruption perception, rated Nigeria as the 144 most corrupt nations out of the 175 countries surveyed. According to the latest report released by Transparency International, Nigeria is now ranked 146 out of the 180 countries considered in 2019. This is two steps lower from 144th ranked in 2018 (Transparency International, 2020; Adesoji, 2020). President Buhari came to power in the 2015 elections and one of his main campaign promises was to fight the corruption that was seen as rife in his predecessor's administration. Consequently, the Buhari administration set up a presidential committee on anti-corruption headed by Professor Itse Sagay. The mandate of the committee includes among other things, to formulate a strategy and co-ordinate the anti-corruption war of the administration ensuring that all sectors of the Nigerian society are involved in the fight (Otunuga, 2016; Amannah & Adeyeye, 2018).

However, five years after, corruption still subsists as one of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria. Despite efforts at curbing corruption in Nigeria under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari it seems the trend of corruption is on the increase (Momoh, 2018).

Recently, public attention has been drawn to the spectacles of corruption cases in Nigeria especially in government agencies. The gale of corruption discovered in the ministries, institutions and agencies of government especially in NDDC and EFCC in recent time is alarming and humongous (Olugbode, 2020; Ozah, 2020). For instance some of the agencies of government have been enmeshed and embroiled with one scandal of corruption to another in recent times. These are: Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) corruption scandal that has led to the suspension of the Managing Director and two Executive Directors; the crisis in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) where the removed Managing Director, Joi Nunieh and the Niger Delta Minister, Godswill Akpabio are trading damaging allegations of corruption; the allegations of wrongdoing, including insubordination, failure to properly account for recovered assets, abuse of office, and other corrupt acts levelled against the Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Ibrahim Magu (Ekpo, Chime & Enor, 2016; Olawale, 2020; Thisdaylive Editorial, 2020).

Consequently, the president has set up probe panel to investigate the affairs of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and he had expressed regrets that some public officials put in positions of trust had abused the confidence reposed in them. Again, corruption especially among top political and public officials under the executive arm of government in Nigeria has been a major problem confronting the present administration in Nigeria. This has shown that moral values are fast diminishing among the people. As it were, integrity, honesty and dedication to duty have collapsed in the society and particularly among politicians, political office holders and government officials. The menace of corruption in Nigeria poses a great threat to the development of the country (Ozah, 2020).

Table 1: Nigeria's Corruption Perception Index 2017 – 2023

Country	Year	Rank	Score
Nigeria	2023	144	27
"	2022	148	27
"	2021	136	28
"	2020	136	26
"	2019	136	27
"	2018	144	25
"	2017	139	27

Source: Author's Compilation from Transparency International (2023).

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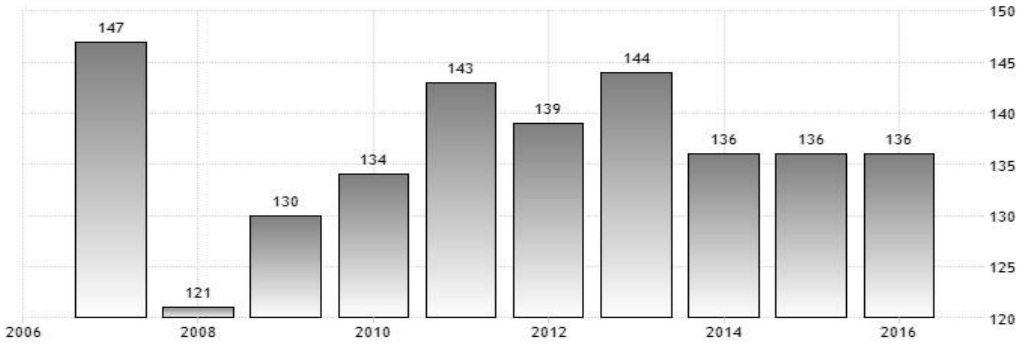
Figure 1: Nigeria Corruption Rank



Source: Trading economics (202) in collaboration with Transparency International

Nigeria continues to rank abysmally low in the global corruption index[2] in the recent past. Table 7.1 shows that in 2015 when the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari assumed power, the country's corruption ranking has plummeted from 136 in 2015 to 144 in 2023. Figure 1 indicates that corruption rank in Nigeria averaged 119.14 from 1996 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 152 in 2005 and a record low of 52 in 1997 (Trading Economics, 2017). To underscore this statistics, in a conversation with the Queen of England at Buckingham palace in May 2016, the immediate-past Prime Minister of Britain, David Cameron made an undiplomatic and outspoken remark about Nigeria, "we've got some leaders of some fantastically corrupt countries coming to Britain... Nigeria and Afghanistan- possibly the two most corrupt countries in the world" (David Cameron calls Nigeria, 2016, para. 1). Whereas, the statement may be undiplomatic and unguarded, it is not untrue. It is shameful for Nigeria to be placed on the same pedestal with a war-thorn country like Afghanistan. Perhaps, Achebe (1984) captures the sentiments of most Nigerians when he maintains, "my frank and honest opinion is that anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country". Obviously, this is not a recent development as Obuah (2010) observes, "…between 1960 and 1999, about $220billion has been plundered and squandered by public officials in Nigeria". The slow pace of development in the country can be traced to this anomaly. This grim reality continues to render the "giant of Africa" into "a veritable modern wasteland, a nation where corruption is extolled as national culture" (Ojukwu & Shopeju, 2010).

From the preceding discussion, one can deduce that the pervasiveness of corruption in the Nigerian state renders the country's claim to hegemony an illusion. While Nigeria fulfils all the attributes of a realist hegemon, endemic corruption in high and low places has rendered its quest for Pax-Nigeriana a distant dream. Despite efforts by the government to curb the malaise, cases of monumental corruption scandals have rendered the country's economy comatose, its military weak (dependent on obsolete weapons) and unable to protect its territorial integrity. The best brains in its population continue to exit the country in search of greener pastures abroad leading to severe brain drain. James & Agazie (2013) cited in Ade-Ibijola (2014) sums up the discussion thus: If you judge African nations by the degree of corruption that goes on at both the governmental and

local levels, Nigeria has no equal. To say that there is no corruption in Nigeria is to make an irresponsible statement, despite glaring evidence to the contrary. Pejoratives abound in every discussion about Nigeria which is considered to be the so-called "Epitome of African corruption.

The Nature and Effects of Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption pervades the whole of fabric of Nigeria. It is systematically practiced by the ruling elite and comes in many guises, including: embezzlement of state funds, clientelism, nepo-tism, fraud, bribery and, as a result, large-scale money laundering at home and abroad. It permeates every level of society, from highlevel politicians and civil servants to the security forces, business people and the country's poorest citizens (Kreck, 2019). Thus, corruption manifests itself in Nigeria in form of abuse of position and privileges, low level of transparency and accountability, inflation of contacts, bribery, kickbacks, misappropriation or diversion of funds, under and over invoicing, false declaration, advance free fraud know as 419, collection of illegal tolls, etc (Ogbonnaya, 2018). Corruption has been the source of problems militating against the attainment of political integration, political stability, social justice, equity and economic development in Nigeria. Corruption is responsible for the high level of poverty, insecurity, widespread diseases, and high unemployment rate. In Nigeria, public revenues are not only stolen and misused, but often pay for the services and weapons behind political violence experienced in the country (Umuna, 2018). Corruption, which has been depriving the country of the resources it needs to develop, is largely to blame for the current state of affairs (Kreck, 2019). The current situation in Nigeria is largely due to the scale of corruption that has deprived the country of vital development capital for decades **(**Kreck, 2019). As it were, corruption has been largely responsible for the seeming collapse of every institution in the Nigeria. It is disheartening to note that corruption is not only systemic, it has become institutionalized that no aspect of societal life is spared (Ozah, 2020).

Despite having the world's seventh largest reserve of crude oil coupled with other resources in Nigeria, poverty and underdevelopment still ravage the country, this can be seen from all indexes of development over the years. The major reason advanced for this is the prevalence of corruption in governance, public and private places (Nageri, Umar & Abdul, 2013). Thus, the impact of corruption has drastically increased the rate of poverty in Nigeria in recent times. For instance, it was first revealed in June 2018 that Nigeria had overtaken India as the nation with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty across the world, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians measured to be living on less than $1.90 (N684) a day. Thus, the World Poverty Clock had named Nigeria the poverty capital of the world in June, 2018. Presently, Nigeria had about 93.7 million people in extreme poverty, compared with India's 73 million. What is more, extreme poverty in Nigeria is growing by six people every minute, while poverty in India continues to fall." India with a population of 1.324 billion people previously held the position, which is now occupied by Nigeria which has a population of about 200 million (Aderinokun, 2018; Olayinka, 2019).

Impact of Corruption on Democratic Governance under Buhari's Administration

Informing the negative perceptions, as it seemed, were perceived and actual biases in the execution of the anti-corruption campaign of President Buhari. Some argued that mostly targeted for prosecution were members of the PDP (Abosede, 2018; Mossman, 2019). The US government that was once effusive in praise of the anti-corruption programme expressed worry over unaddressed corruption allegations involving APC elites and allies of President Buhari (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Evidences abound that those who are strong supporter of President Buhari or a member of the ruling Political party APC have been left unprosecuted for corruption cases. Some of these people include; Mr. Andrew Yakubu, former GMD of Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation's (NNPC), Babachir Lawal, Former SSG to the President, Ambassador Ayodele Oke, former head of the National Intelligence Agency, Professor Usman Yusuf, head of the National Health Insurance Scheme, Abdulrasheed Maina, former Director of Pension Scheme, etc, (Bada, 2018; Bello, 2018; Akinkuotu, Adeoye& Alagbe, 2018; Tukur, 2019; Sobechi, 2020). For instance, in 2016, President Buhari was reportedly presented evidence that his Chief of Staff, Abba Kyari, took N500 million naira bribe from MTN to help it slash the $5 Billion dollar fine slammed against it for violation of Nigeria telecommunications regulations bothering on national security (Opejobi, 2016). MTN fired the staff involved in the bribery scandal (Sahara Reporters, 2016). But Abba Kyari was left intact in his position as Chief of Staff to national outrage forcing Buhari to announce the probe of Kyari. The findings of the investigation were never made public (Sahara Reporters, 2016; Omonobi, 2016).

In addition, Abdulrasheed Maina, President Buhari ally who was the head of the task force on pension reforms during the President Goodluck Jonathan led administration but fled Nigeria in 2015 after claims that he embezzled two billion naira ($5.6 million, 4.8 million euros). Despite the fact that an Interpol arrest warrant was issued, he still managed to return to Nigeria, where he was said to have enjoyed protection from the Buhari government (Vanguard, 2017). Maina was sacked in 2013 during Goodluck Jonathan's administration and was put under investigation for corrupt practices but was reinstated and given double promotion by Buhari administration (Abdulaziz, & Busari, 2017). Corrupt persons have been spared on account of party allegiance. There were cases that went cold possibly on account of the change of political affiliation of the accused persons or lack of zeal in their prosecution. They include Godswill Akpabio for his indictment of allegedly stealing N180 billion, Senator Adamu Abdullahi, who was facing charges for misappropriating N15 billion, APC's former national chairman, Adams Oshiomhole, who was indicted for $55 million in bribery, who was quoted as saying that any corrupt politician that finds his way to the ruling party would have his sins forgiven (Sobechi, 2020). For example, Godswill Akpabio, who has been suspected of corruption, was made Minister of Affairs of the oil-rich Niger Delta. He was the -PDP governor of Akwa Ibom State from 2007 to 2015, and was a -PDP senator and Senate Minority Leader during the last legislative period. In August 2018, he was in the spotlight when he left the -PDP and joined the -APC. Before his nomination was announced, the -EFCC refused to respond to press queries relating to ongoing corruption investigations against him and his wife (Kreck, 2019). Also, Babachir Lawal (the immediate past Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) who diverted funds that were

assigned for rehabilitation purposes in the crisis-ridden North-East Nigeria to his private pockets? He has been walking freely because he is a top member of the ruling (All Progressives Congress) APC (Adebusuyi, 2019).

Again, a well-known financier and supporter of the APC administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, Ex-Governor of Bayelsa State, Timipre Sylva was alleged to have looted ¦ 19.7 billion and was facing trial before Justice A. Y. Mohammed of the Federal High Court, Abuja. However, two days after President Buhari was sworn in, the new APC government withdrew the charges preferred against Sylva on June 1, 2015 and on October 3, 2018, the EFCC returned to Sylva, 48 houses seized from him during the administration of former president, Goodluck Jonathan in 2013 to him (Bada, 2018; Akinkuotu, Adeoye & Alagbe, 2018). In fact, some of these alleged corrupt persons; politicians and government officials (former and present) are displayed in the table below

Table 2: Alleged Corrupt Officials and Politicians Under Buhari Administration

S/N	Name	Alleged Corrupt act	Status
1	Ambassador	Oke was the former DG of the	There has
2	Ayodele	been no news	National Intelligence Agency
3	Oke and	(NIA), of the outcome of the	allegedly hid
4	his wife	$43million totaling	prosecution of either
	Folashade	N13billion of government's fund	in
	Mr. Andrew	Folashade or the a Lagos apartment.	The
	Yakubu	money was	Ayodele Oke under an
	Mustapha	discovered in one of the flats,	where
	Maihaja	administration that is his wife runs a private	
	Ishaq Kawu	firm in Ikoyi,	fighting corruption. Lagos.
		Folashade, the wife of Oke, was said to have rented the flat for the sum of $1.6m, which she paid cash, and lodged the remaining part of the loot in the safety of the flat before she was expose.	Due to the affinity to the president, EFCC is powerless to act on the case
		He was former Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation's (NNPC) boss, and he was arrested for corruption by EFCC and N39 billion ($9.7m and £74000) recovered from his home.	Due to the affinity to the president, EFCC is powerless to act on the case
		Director General of National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). He was	Due to the affinity to the president, EFCC is case

		indicted for embezzling N33billion. Director General of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation's (NBC). He was indicted for	
5	Babachir Lawal	The immediate past Secretary to the Has been sacked after Government of the Federation. He protest by the opposition was indicted for awarding N223m and civil society. He has consultancy contract for the removal still not been charged of invasive plant species in Komadugu, he was allowed to be Yobe Water Channels to his company, Rholavision Engineering in contravention of Section 43(iii) and (iv) of the Public Procurement Act 2007 by the by the Senate ad hoc Committee on Mounting Humanitarian Crisis in the North-East	replaced as SGF by his own cousin
6	Abdulrasheed Maina	Former head of the task force on pension reforms during the President Goodluck Jonathan led administration but fled Nigeria in 2015 after claims that he embezzled two billion naira ($5.6 million, 4.8 million euros).	He was reinstated into the civil service with a promotion as deputy director ministry of interior and has not been prosecuted.
7	Professor Usman Yusuf	DG, National Health Insurance Scheme, was suspended/sacked for allegedly involved in a fraud to the	Professor Usman Yusuf, was reinstated despite being under

		tune of N919 million.	investigation for fraud.
8	Godswill Akpabio	Former Governor of Akwa Ibom State and current Minister of Niger Delta Affairs. He was under investigation by EFCC for alleged embezzlement of N108bn during his tenure as governor of Akwa Ibom State (2007-2015).	He has not been prosecuted and his case is still pending with the EFCC
9	Rotimi Amaechi	Former Governor of Rivers State and current Minister of Transportation. He was indicted by the Justice George Omeregi-led Rivers State Judicial Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the sale of state assets. He and others were accused of allegedly misappropriating N97bn through the sale of the state valued assets.	He has not been prosecuted
10	Ganduje Yahaya	Current governor of Kano State. He was caught in video evidence collecting bribe of large chunks of American dollars from an undisclosed associate and rolling them into his babaringa in the last quarter of 2018.	He has not been prosecuted by EFCC due to immunity of prosecution
11	Ibrahim Magu	Former acting chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). He was accused of a myriad of contraventions,	Currently facing Presidential probe panel

especially diversion of recovered loot, insubordination and misconduct by the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and Justice Minister, Abubakar Malami. He was also alleged of selling off most the assets recovered by the EFCC without the knowledge of anyone.

Source: Adapted from Adetayo, (2017); Bada (2018); Akinkuotu, Adeoye and Alagbe (2018); Awala, (2018); Tukur, (2019); Kreck, (2019); Sobechi (2020).

The issues of nepotism and favouritism which are forms of corruption have also characterized most of the appointments into key positions by President Buhari. The biggest trouble with the Buhari administration is the elephant in the room variously tagged as "lopsided appointments," "nepotism," "sectionalism", ''parochialism,'' etc, (The Guardian Editorial, 2020). These have been largely displayed with impunity. For example, there is imbalance in the appointments of those heading the military and para-military agencies. These are displayed in the table below:

Table 3: Personnel of Military and Para-Military Agencies in Nigeria

S/N	Name of Officer	Position	State of Origin
1	Bashir Salihi Magashi	Minister of Defence	Kano State
2	Babagana Monguno	National Security Adviser	Bornu State
3	Abayomi Olonisakin	Chief of Defence Staff	Ekiti State
4	Tukur Burutai	Chief of Army Staff	Bornu State
5	Sadique Abubakar	Chief of Air Staff,	Bauchi State
6	Ibok-EteIbas	Chief of Naval Staff	Cross River State
7	Mohammed Adamu	Inspector General of Police	Nasarawa State
8	Yusuf Bichi	Director-General, Department of State Services	Kano State
9	Ahmed Abubakar	Director-General, National Intelligence Agency	Katsina State
10	Hameed Ali	Comptroller-General of Customs	Bauchi State
11	Jaafar Ahmed	Comptroller General, Nigeria Correction Services	Kebbi State
12	Mohammed Babandede	Comptroller General, Nigeria Immigration Service	Jigawa State

13	Liman Ibrahim	Controller General, Federal Fire Service	Niger State
14	Abdullahi Muhammadu	Commandant General, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC),	Niger State

Source: Adapted from Adebowale, (2020).

The table 2 is an evident from extant appointments to the commanding heights of the military and paramilitary institutions that now seem an exclusive preserve of people from a section of the country (Omeihe, 2020). As you can see, almost all the agencies under the Ministry of Internal Affairs are headed by people from a section of the country. Apart from Chief of Naval Staff, Ibok-EteIbas who is from Cross River State in the South-South geo-political zone and Chief of Defence Staff, Abayomi Olonisakin who is from Ekiti State in the South-West geo-political zone, all others are from the north. This has never happened in all the 60 years of Nigeria as an independent entity. How does this list represent Nigeria, in key military and para-military agencies like these? This list cannot and will not promote a sense of national unity in this country of ours called Nigeria (Adebowale, 2020). In 2017 there was outrage in some parts of the country over the lopsided appointments in the Department of State Service (DSS) by the president. The appointments revealed that 51 of the 479 new recruits came from Katsina the President's state of origin, which is more than the 42 new cadets recruited from the six South-South states. These appointments are shown in the table below.

Table 4: Key Management Positions Held By Northerners in NNPC

S/N	Name	Position Held
1	Mele Kolo Kyari	Group Managing Director, GMD
2	Umar Isa Ajiya	Chief Finance Officer, Finance & Account
3	Yusuf Usman	Chief Operating Officer, Gas & Power
4	Farouk Garba Sa'id	Chief Operating Officer, Corporate Services
5	Mustapha Y. Yakubu	Chief Operating Officer, Refining and Petrochemicals
6	Hadiza Y. Coomassie	Corporate Secretary/Legal Adviser to the Corporation
7	Omar Farouk Ibrahim	GGM, International Energy Relations, IER
8	Kallamu Abdullahi	GGM, Renewable Energy
9	Ibrahim Birma	GGM, Governance Risk and Compliance
10	Bala Wunti	GGM, NAPIMS
11	Inuwa Waya	MD, NNPC Shipping
12	Musa Lawan	MD, Pipelines & Product Marketing, PPMC
13	Mansur Sambo	MD, Nigeria Petroleum Development Company, NPDC
14	Lawal Sade	MD, Duke Oil/NNPC Trading Company
15	Malami Shehu	MD, Port Harcourt Refining Company

16	Muhammed Abah	MD, Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company
17	Abdulkadir Ahmed	MD, Nigeria Gas Marketing Company
18	Salihu Jamari	MD, Nigeria Gas and Power Investment Company Limited
19	Mohammed Zango	MD, NNPC Medical Services
20	Sarki Auwalu.	Director, Department of Petroleum Resources, DPR

Source: Onyekakeyah (2020).

From these appointments in the above table, the entire southern Nigeria was allotted only three top management positions in the NNPC. In other words, the oil-producing zones of South-south, Southeast, and South-west are left with one Chief Operating Officer Position each, and a few senior and middle-level management positions in peripheral and incidental subsidiaries, departments and divisions of the corporation (Onyekakeyah, 2020). This development makes one wonder if the organization has surreptitiously become Northern Nigeria Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). To say the least, the northernisation of federal offices is legendry and a daylight assault on merit or national integration (The Guardian Editorial, 2020).

Moreso, there is gross imbalance and dominance by northerners in an unprecedented manner at the top of all these institutions and agencies of government below: Federal Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, Nigeria Ports Authority, Central Bank of Nigeria, Tertiary Education Fund, Bank of Industry, Pension Commission, Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, Petroleum Technology Development Fund, Petroleum Pricing and Regulation Agency, Petroleum Equalisation Fund, Department of Petroleum Resources, Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education Commission, National Broadcasting Commission, Energy Commission of Nigeria, The Department of State Security (DSS), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Intelligence Agency (NIA), Police Force, Air Force, Nigerian Army, Customs, Immigrations and Correctional Service, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Defence Ministry, NIMASA, Nigerian Shippers' Council, FAAN, NCAA, EFCC, NFIU, Code of Conduct Bureau, (CCB), Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), and so on (Adebowale, 2020: The Guardian Editorial, 2020).

From all indications, almost all key departments and agencies of the federal government under President Buhari are headed by people from the northern part of the country. These appointments are in violation of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria (The Guardian Editorial, 2020). For clarity, Chapter 2, Section 14, subsection 3 of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, provides in detail that: "the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the government or in any of its agencies. The brazen assault on the federal character

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principle in Nigeria was further replicated by the President in the appointment of both the chairman, Dr. Muheeba Farida Dankaka (Kwara State) and the secretary Mohammed Bello Tukur (Taraba State) of the Federal Character Commission from one section of the country - the north contrary to extant tradition (Omeihe, 2020). If such a balancing institution can be subverted in such a manner, what else is left of its constitutional objective? Obviously, in the context of appointments, President Buhari has consistently failed to respect the federal character provision in the country's constitution. The provision is designed to address lopsided appointments and build a peace that has eluded us since independence almost 60 years ago (The Guardian Editorial, 2020).

Embezzlement and Accountability in Nigeria, 2015-2023

The biggest corruption allegation is that of the former National Security Adviser, Colonel Sambo Dasuki (rtd), who was accused to have embezzled $2.1 billion meant for arms procurement to fight against Islamic insurgency in the country. The presidential investigations committee reports suggested that part of the disbursed fund was diverted for the sponsoring of the re-election of former President Goodluck Jonathan (Yusuf, 2015). Even though he had been granted bail by four different high courts in Nigeria and ECOWAS Court of Justice, after over two years in the detention of the Department of State Services (DSS). The government has turned deaf ear to the court order citing national security as an excuse. Meanwhile, Dasuki had filed a fundamental human rights suit against the Federal Government to obey all court orders for his release from detention.

Nigeria's ex-Chief of Defense Staff Alex Badeh faces ten count charges of alleged diversion of N3.9 billion ($20 million) meant for the purchase of arms (EFCC, 2016). In 2016, Badeh could afford an N2 billion ($5.5million) bail and the trial has since continued, but the public has not heard much about trail since then. Another person that is connected to the arms deal scandal is Major General Kenneth Minimah who reportedly returned the sum of N1.7 billion ($4.7million) to the federal government coffers (The Nation, 2018), following the EFCC investigation of his involvement in the missing $2.1billion which has kept Colonel Sambo Dasuki (rtd) in prison since 2015.

The infamous slogan "Who is the Presidency?" brought us to the case of Babachir Lawal the former Secretary to the Federal Government. He was arrested and detained for questioning by the EFCC in January 2018 for alleged fraud, following an indictment by the Senate, and a presidential panel that investigated misuse of funds meant for people displaced by Boko Haram (EFCC, 2019). The arrest came a day after former President Olusegun Obasanjo accused President Buhari of condoning corruption where persons close to him are involved. Babachir Lawal has longed been released from EFCC custody but was relieved from his position. Meanwhile, he considered his sack from the office as a blessing (Ogun-Yusuf, 2018), and in the meantime, his case remains inconclusive. The Nigerian situation shows how almost impossible it is for political expose persons to be convicted. The anti-corruption strategy has been that of media trial and seizure of accused persons' assets. So, the question that the public is pondering about is: will any final verdict ever go to be heard?

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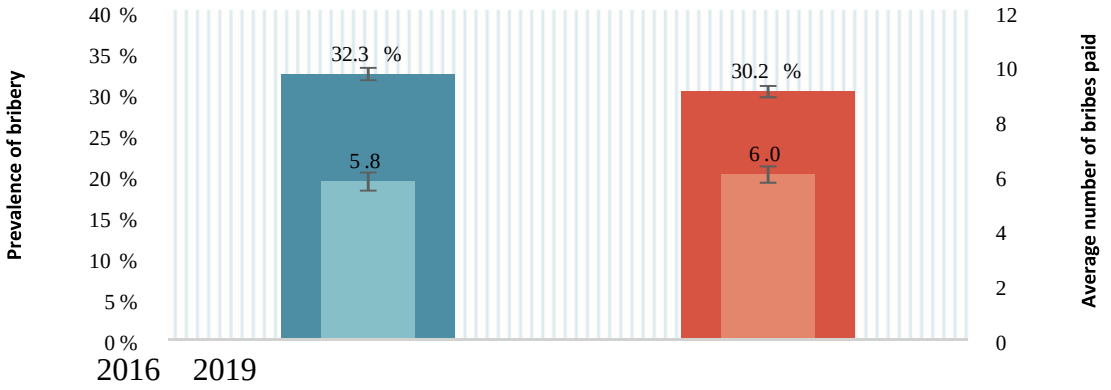
The consequence of these mindless looting of the country's resources has seen Nigeria, one of Africa's wealthiest economies, in May 2018 overtake India as the home to the world's greatest concentration of people living in extreme poverty. This assertion is contained in a paper presented at the Brookings Institution Think-tank, by three experts from the *World Poverty Clock.* According to them, 87 million Nigerians now live in extreme poverty in comparison with India's 73 million people (Oilrich Nigeria outstrips India, 2018: para 3). To understand the implications of this statistics, the total population of the two countries must be put in perspective to appreciate the weightiness of this finding. India has a population of 1,354,051,854 billion people compared to Nigeria's 193,989,640 million (Worldometers, 2018). Similar figures released in February 2018 by the African Development Bank shows that almost 80% of Nigerians, representing about 152 million of its estimated 193.3 million people, lived on less than $2 per day (Oil-rich Nigeria outstrips India, 2018: para 8).

Figure 2: Prevalence and frequency of bribery at the national level, Nigeria, 2016 and 2019



Source: Author's Compilation from Nigerian C (2023). Corruption Index

The prevalence of bribery is calculated as the number of adult Nigerians who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked to pay a bribe by a public official, on at least one occasion in the 12 months prior to the survey, as a percentage of all adult Nigerians who had at least one contact with a public official. The average number of bribes refers to the average number of bribes paid by all bribe-payers, i.e., those who paid at least one bribe in the 12 months prior to the survey. The black bars indicate the confidence intervals for the prevalence and the frequency of bribery at 95 per cent confidence level. Taylor series expansion is used to calculate the confidence intervals for the prevalence rates.

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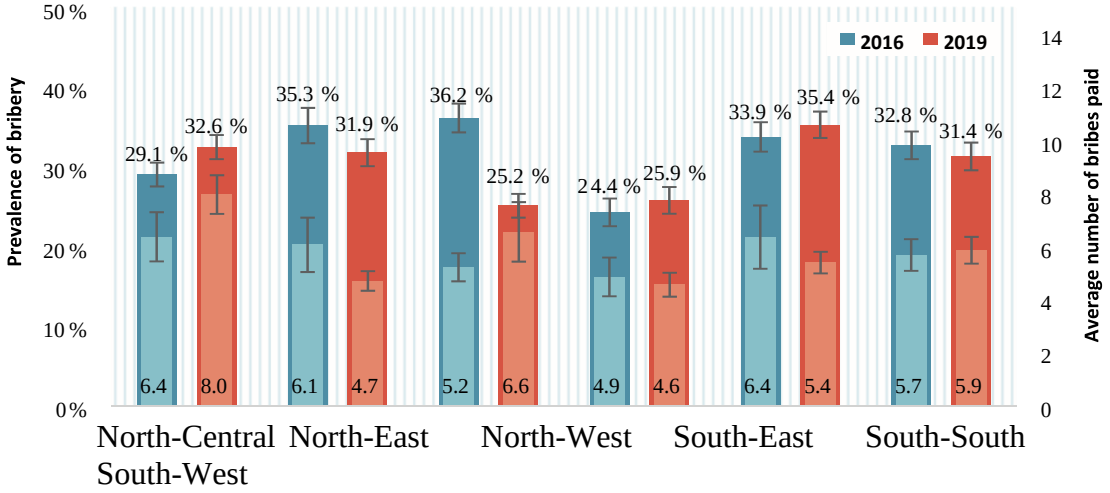
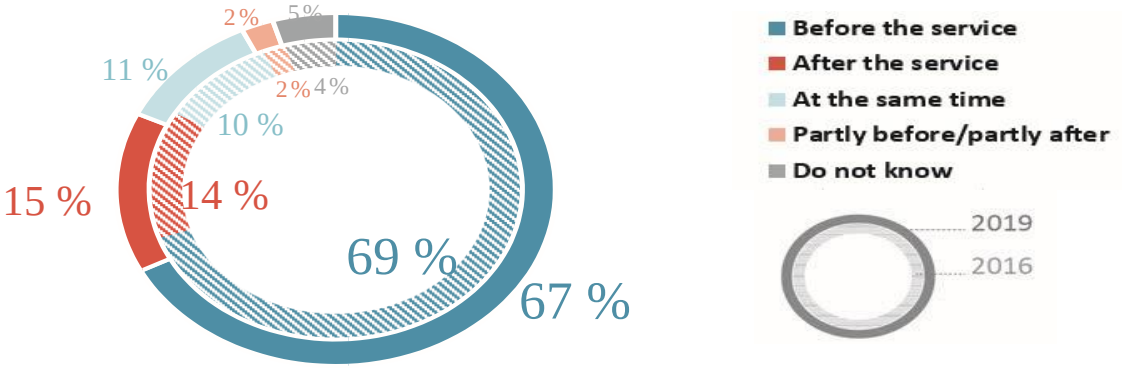
Figure 3: Prevalence and frequency of bribery, by zone, Nigeria, 2016 and 2019



Source: Author's Compilation from Nigerian C (2023). Corruption Index

The prevalence of bribery is calculated as the number of adult Nigerians who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked to pay a bribe by a public official, on at least one occasion in the 12 months prior to the survey, as a percentage of all adult Nigerians who had at least one contact with a public official. The average number of bribes refers to the average number of bribes paid by all bribe-payers, i.e., those who paid at least one bribe in the 12 months prior to the survey. While in 2016 the prevalence of bribery was also higher in urban areas than in rural areas (35 versus 31 per cent or 4 percentage points), the increasing urban-rural disparity is driven by two contrasting developments: first, a decline in the prevalence of bribery in the rural areas of four out of the country's six zones, especially the North-West; second, significant increases in the prevalence of bribery in the urban areas of the North-Central and South-South zones.

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of bribes paid to public officials, by timing of payment, Nigeria, 2016 and *2019*



Source: Author's Compilation from Nigerian C (2023). Corruption Index

The combination of how bribes are instigated and the timing of bribe payments reveals some very interesting patterns. For example, whenever a public official requests a bribe, whether directly or indirectly, between 55 and 77 per cent of bribes are paid before the

service in question is provided. This finding underlines the bargaining power of public officials, whose position enables them to solicit a payment in exchange for the promise of providing a public service. However, a significant number of bribes are also paid before the provision of a service in order to incentivize officials to either expedite a service or to avoid red tape. The majority of people who pay unsolicited bribes purely as a sign of appreciation do so after a service has been provided. The finding that there has been little change in this pattern since the 2016 survey implies that there may be a familiar and established routine relating to when payments should be made depending on the nature of the request and the service to be provided.

The fact that unsolicited bribes are also paid as a sign of gratitude (mostly after or partly after a service) indicates that some officials in the Nigerian administration expect to receive an "extra" even when providing a service that it is their duty to provide for free. The average size of cash bribes paid in 2019 was remarkably different across the zones of Nigeria, with an average smaller than the national average of NGN 5,754 in all but one zone. At NGN 2,552 ($23,15 PPP), the average was smallest in the North-Central zone, where more than 65 per cent of bribes were of less than NGN 1,500. By contrast, by far the largest average amount was paid in the South-South, at NGN 14,641 ($144,6 PPP), almost three times the national average.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation

Summary of Findings

From all indications, despite the efforts at curbing corruption in Nigeria under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari, it seems the trend of corruption is on the increase (Momoh, 2018). Reports shows that the current Buharis's administration is fighting corruption but it lacks the basic understanding of what drives it in Nigeria. This weakness reveals why it has concentrated on punishment without addressing the socio-economic factors driving corruption. An overwhelming majority people in Nigeria do not have portable water to drink, they don't have access to stable power supply, they do not have good roads to carry out commercial activities and their income per capita is too low to do anything more than just consume to stay alive (Amannah & Adeyeye, 2018). How does one stop a ridiculously low-income earner from taking bribe under the present inflationary circumstance? These are the pathetic situations confronting average Nigerian citizens.

From the above, the study revealed the following:

1. Bribery has a significant impact on transparency within democratic governance in Anambra State, Nigeria.
2. Embezzlement significantly affects government accountability in Anambra State, Nigeria.
3. Nepotism significantly influences the rule of law in Nigeria's democratic governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the detrimental impact of political corruption on democratic governance in Anambra State, Nigeria. Through a thorough analysis, the findings reveal that bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism significantly undermine the

essential pillars of democratic governance which are transparency, government accountability, and the rule of law. Firstly, bribery has been found to substantially affect transparency within democratic governance. This finding corroborates the earlier work of Abubakar and Fadeyi (2022), who identified corruption as a pervasive disease within Nigerian democracy, obstructing the transparency necessary for a healthy democratic process. The rampant practice of bribery skews decision-making processes and erodes public trust, making it difficult for democratic institutions to function effectively.

Secondly, the study highlights that embezzlement significantly impacts government accountability. This aligns with the findings of Mungiu-Pippidi and Dadašov (2017), who emphasized the detrimental consequences of corrupt financial practices on governance. When public officials engage in embezzlement, they divert resources meant for public services into private pockets, leading to inefficiencies and failures in public service delivery. This erosion of accountability not only affects the immediate community but also has long-term implications for the development and trust in governmental institutions.

Thirdly, nepotism is shown to significantly influence the rule of law in Nigeria's democratic governance. This finding resonates with the conclusions drawn by Osei-Hwedie and Ayee (2020), who pointed out the adverse effects of favoritism and unfair practices on the equitable application of legal principles. Nepotism undermines the meritocratic principles that should guide public service, leading to the appointment of unqualified individuals and the perpetuation of inefficiency and corruption within governmental structures. These findings affirm that political corruption is a major impediment to the development of robust democratic governance in Nigeria.

Based on the afore findings, the study therefore recommend the following:

1. **Strengthen Anti-Bribery Measures:** Enhance and enforce anti-bribery laws with strict penalties and independent oversight bodies to monitor and report bribery. This will improve transparency and trust in the political system.
2. **Enhance Financial Oversight:** Implement robust auditing processes, increase transparency in government expenditures, and establish a whistleblower protection program. These steps will promote greater accountability and reduce embezzlement.
3. **Promote Merit-Based Appointments:** Develop clear, transparent criteria for hiring and promotions to ensure positions are filled based on qualifications, not personal connections. This will uphold the rule of law and enhance public trust in institutions.
4. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch campaigns to educate citizens on the negative impacts of corruption and encourage participation in anti-corruption initiatives. This will foster a culture of integrity and public accountability.

Based on the reviewed literature, the researchers make the following recommendations:

a. E-commerce via social media should be adopted by more Nigerian business owners in order to boost their bottom line.
b. E-commerce should deliberately target young people since they are more at home with social media as digital natives and netizens.
c. There should be constant and real-time engagement of customers and potential customers through social media as many online buyers more often than not, reach purchase decisions after consulting friends online and reading recommendations, reviews and comments of others on a particular product or service.
d. Due to the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant resurgent waves, e-commerce should be the model of choice for business survival in Nigeria, the African continent and the world at large.

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