ADMINISTRATIVE CORRUPTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Given the complexity and varied functions of government, effective management of public resources requires well-trained officials who can deliver social services that support a country's developmental aspirations. In Nigeria, however, administrative corruption remains a major obstacle to national development. While previous studies have examined public administration, underdevelopment and corruption as separate issues, this study uniquely links Nigeria's developmental challenges to entrenched administrative corruption. Using trend analysis and a qualitative assessment of secondary data drawn from official reports, government audits, scholarly works and investigative media accounts, the study explores how corruption within administrative system undermines development efforts. The findings show that administrative corruption in Nigeria is pervasive and replicates itself across sectors, thereby weakening the development initiatives of successive governments. The paper recommends the adoption of stringent measures, not only to penalise offenders, but also to promote integrity, probity and accountability across public institutions as essential steps towards national development.

Keywords: Administration, Corruption, Development, Government, Institutions.

Introduction and the problem

Corruption appears to be a universal phenomenon, cutting across geography and systems of government (Arowolo, 2022; Nte, 2022). What varies, perhaps, are its intensity and the scale of its consequences (Parsons, 2025). It is found in poor countries, and its traces are equally discernible in wealthy nations. It defies the deterrent effect of law and assaults the moral fabric and decency of society (Rosenfeld & Sajó, 2025). Indeed, corruption remains one of the most enduring challenges confronting humanity. It is a global threat that breeds deprivation in the midst of abundance (as in Nigeria) (Arowolo, 2025a), renders governments ineffective in service delivery (Somalia) (Ahmed, Abdullahi & Hussein, 2025), diverts resources away from critical public services (Ethiopia) (Afrobarometer, 2024; Transparency International, 2025a), triggers political instability (Kenya) (Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, 2023), prolongs violent conflict (Angola) (Duarte Lledó & Miguel, 2025; GAN Integrity, 2020; Pacatolo, Boio & Sabino, 2024), and fuels patronage-based rule and "militarised kleptocracies" (Sudan and South Sudan) (Kristof, 2015; Warf, 2017). Scholars widely agree that the scale and pervasiveness of corruption in Africa are unmatched elsewhere (Bergin, 2024; Njangang, Asongu & Mouchili, 2024; Rosenfeld & Sajó, 2025; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2025; World Bank, 2023).

Africa's vulnerability to corrosive corruption has contributed to its stunted growth, widespread poverty, and entrenched illiteracy (Bergin, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Transparency International's (2025b) account presents a grim picture of its developmental cost: around 80 per cent of Africans live on less

than $2 a day; approximately $50 billion is illicitly siphoned out of the continent annually; and an estimated 75 million citizens reportedly paid bribes (Transparency International, 2025b). Such resources could have provided employment and essential social services. This situation partly explains why widespread underdevelopment persists across the continent, from Zimbabwe to Libya. Corruption reproduces poverty and sustains deprivation, leaving Africa in a precarious position in the fight against the scourge (Emedem, 2023; Transparency International, 2025b). Evidence from the Afrobarometer (2024) survey confirms the depth of public concern, with citizens in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia and Uganda identifying corruption as the foremost obstacle to their national aspirations (Afrobarometer, 2024). Hence, the consensus in the literature is that corruption remains an entrenched problem in African governance systems (Afrobarometer, 2024; Ahmed, Abdullahi & Hussein, 2025; Arowolo, 2022; Parsons, 2025; Nte, 2022; Rosenfeld & Sajó, 2025).

Perhaps the most troubling variant is corruption within the bureaucracy. Its roots in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial administration, whose bureaucratic apparatus was designed not for local development, but to facilitate the exploitation of resources for the advancement of Europe and America (Ajayi, 2022; Arowolo, 2022; Myerson, 2022; Heldring & Robinson, 2013; Rodney, 1972). Consequently, the public service was never intended to be development-oriented; rather, it served the kleptocratic interests of its founders (Ajayi, 2022; Rodney, 1972). Over time, administrative corruption has become deeply embedded in government ministries, departments, and agencies, evolving into a pervasive culture (Rosenfeld & Sajó, 2025). Citizens seeking public services are seldom surprised when officials demand money for tasks already performed poorly. From inflated electricity bills, palm-greasing, and contract kickbacks to sex-for-grades, purchased examination scores, admission racketeering, and even vote buying, corruption cuts across every layer of Nigerian society (Arowolo & Olaniyan, 2018). This entrenched reality also fuels bureaucratic resistance to reform, as officials cling to the rents generated by corruption.

The relationship between administration and development is symbiotic (Briggs & Obayori, 2022). Bureaucracy is the engine that translates state policies into developmental outcomes. When corruption erodes its capacity, development is inevitably compromised. This distortion has contributed significantly to Nigeria's developmental stagnation. Where development falters, underdevelopment becomes entrenched. Various indicators confirm this: in 2022, multidimensional poverty affected approximately 63 per cent of the population; Nigeria recorded a low Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.56 in 2023; and GDP per capita has continued to decline, reaching around $824 in 2025. Nigeria has the second-largest population of poor people globally, with an estimated 87 million citizens (38.9 per cent) living below the poverty line (BBC, 2025). In 2018, 75.5 per cent of the rural population and 41.3 per cent of the urban population lived in poverty (World Bank, 2025). Nigeria has been classified as an underdeveloped country by the World Bank and the United Nations due to its low HDI ranking, 163rd out of 191 countries, and its widening poverty and inequality. These challenges persist despite Nigeria being Africa's largest economy by aggregate GDP (World Bank, 2025). The country's underdevelopment is visible in its vast infrastructure deficits, high poverty levels, and limited human capital development.

While scholars have extensively examined corruption, public administration, and underdevelopment in Nigeria, much of the existing research continues to concentrate on political corruption, its manifestations, and the factors that sustain it (Gbadamosi & Ajogbeje, 2018; Hoffmann & Hilton, 2025; Ojo et al., 2020; Ugiagbe, 2022; Yagboyaju, 2017). What remains insufficiently explored is corruption within the administrative setting and its implications for national development. This gap is significant because administrative corruption is often more enduring than political corruption and strikes at the very core of development processes. This study, therefore, contributes to the discourse by interrogating the relationship between administrative corruption and Nigeria's persistent developmental challenges. The next section reviews the interconnected concepts underpinning these challenges, with a view to clarifying their meanings and establishing how they relate to the implementation of the national development agenda.

Conceptual and contextual explanations

This section conceptualises and contextualises the core analytical tools of this study: corruption, administration, and development. These concepts are inherently interlinked, and their combined influence is critical to the understanding of developmental challenges experienced across every sector of the Nigerian economy. The pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria makes it imperative to conceptualise and contextualise it in order to engage fully with the salient issues presented hereafter. According to Arowolo (2022), corruption is a concept that appears difficult to define, yet it must be defined. The concept suffers not only from conceptual ambiguity but also from definitional plurality.

This explains the extensive scholarly attention corruption has received, with no universally accepted definition (Adeyemi, 2021; Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, 2025; Transparency International, 2025b; Wan Murshida bt Wan Hashim & Mazlena bt Muhamad Hussain, 2024). What is corruption? Its conceptualisation should begin with its moral implications, reflecting its Latin origin, *corrumpere*, meaning "to lose value" or "become depraved" (Arowolo, 2022). Building on this interpretation, the Singaporean Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (2025) defines corruption as an act of dishonesty involving the perversion of rules for private gain. Banini (2020) defines corruption as the misuse of public-delegated powers to further economic interests at the expense of the common good. Moreover, abuse of office in procurement processes for personal gain, as highlighted by Arowolo (2022) and Banini (2020), is particularly relevant to Nigeria's administrative system and has the potential to exacerbate pervasive underdevelopment.

The widespread nature of corruption in Nigeria has had far-reaching effects, especially on administration and development. Scholars such as Onuoha et al. (2020) and Lenshie et al. (2024) argue that corruption erodes institutional integrity, weakens governance structures, and heightens state fragility, particularly within the civil service, making it difficult to utilise resources for their intended purposes. This erosion of trust in public institutions significantly undermines the state's capacity to deploy resources effectively and efficiently to promote national development.

Corruption in Nigeria's administrative system manifests in various forms, including diversion of budgetary allocations (Banini, 2020), inflated procurement contracts (Lenshie et al., 2024), use of substandard materials in capital projects (Gazzola, 2018), mismanagement of infrastructure budgets (Onuoha et al., 2020), and outright embezzlement of unspent funds (Arowolo & Akinola, 2025). These practices enervate the administration's capacity to deliver social services, leaving resources intended for national development either mismanaged or siphoned off for private gain. Consequently, national institutions become vulnerable, further exacerbating corruption and deepening developmental challenges.

Lipset and Lenz (2000) define corruption as an effort to acquire wealth or power through illegal means. Transparency International (2025b) posits that corruption is the abuse of public power for private benefit. They further identify acts such as bribery and extortion, which typically involve multiple parties, and other malfeasances that a public official cannot carry out alone, including fraud and embezzlement. Corruption manifests in governmental activities through the appropriation of public assets for private use and the embezzlement of public funds by politicians and high-level officials. In Africa, the causes of corruption vary according to local culture and governance systems, but scholars generally agree on key factors: negative colonial legacy, poor leadership, greed, authoritarianism, clientelism and patronage systems, weak institutions, centralised state structures, lack of political will, and limited accountability and transparency (Lumumba, 2014; Masabo, 2014; Waithim & Burns, 2014).

Adeyemi (2021) observes that corruption has become highly pervasive, penetrating all spheres of state and society, and hindering equity, efficiency, effectiveness, economy, and ethics. Osinbajo (2017) maintains that corruption has damaged Nigeria's image and obstructed the realisation of a democratic, transparent, and accountable government. It has percolated both vertical and horizontal structures: the executive, legislature, and judiciary, as well as federal, state, and local governments. In this study, corruption is understood as the abuse of public office, trust, or authority to confer undue benefits

(economic, political, administrative, or social) on oneself or a third party, contrary to statutory provisions and the public service code of ethics (Arowolo & Olaniyan, 2018). The level of corruption in Nigeria is reflected in the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2017 survey, which found that corruption is the third most important problem after the high cost of living and unemployment, both of which are consequences of corruption. Specifically, 46.4% of citizens paid bribes to police officers, 33% to prosecutors, 31.5% to judges and magistrates, and 26.5% to customs officers (NBS, 2017). From these conceptualisations, corruption can be inferred as: a deliberate or intentional exploitation of one's position or resources; executed directly or indirectly; conducted for personal gain, whether material or for prestige, influence, or power; in violation of laws or rules; and contrary to the interests of the community.

Administration, in the same vein, is conceptualised both as the process through which public policies are formulated and implemented and as the institutional machinery overseeing such processes. Public policies are government decisions regarding the programmes to be executed to enhance citizens' welfare through the provision of basic needs and other developmental requirements. The implementation of these policies constitutes administration, which involves the organisation and management of societal, group, and organisational resources to achieve set objectives (Sharma et al., 2012). Organisation provides the framework, sets objectives, directs personnel, and allocates resources, while management ensures that resources are controlled, coordinated, and deployed effectively. Administration, therefore, is the combination of organisation and management, facilitating the implementation of policy and the effective management of national resources.

In Nigeria, the administrative system is intertwined with politics across the three tiers of government. Policy formulation is political, while policy implementation is administrative (Arowolo, 2025b). Administration is the machinery through which political decisions are converted into tangible developmental outcomes, making it integral to the political process. It exists at all levels: family, organisational, state, and international, demonstrating its universality. At the national level, administration strategically organises and manages resources to achieve developmental objectives (Arowolo, 2025b). Deficiencies or ineptitude in administration inevitably retard development. This highlights the need to understand development, its influencing factors, and its elusiveness.

Literature on development emphasises the human dimension, which views development as a series of interconnecting movements leading from poverty and vulnerability to security and well-being (Gupta, 2019; Paganelli, 2022; Sen, 1999; Smith, 2023). Smith (2023) describes it as the creation of conditions for the realisation of human personality, entailing reductions in poverty, unemployment and inequality. Development encompasses change in social, political, and economic structures within a country (Sen, 1999). However, development is not meaningful if it is not sustainable. Sustainable development refers to a mode of human development in which resources are used to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is enduring, preserved for generations, and balances human progress with environmental preservation (Paganelli, 2022; Smith, 2023; United Nations General Assembly, 1997).

Research shows that public administration is central to development (Dickson & Danjuma, 2020; Garrido-Vergara & Cienfuegos, 2025; Puppim de Oliveira, 2021), as it not only implements policies but also contributes significantly to policy formulation, thereby driving national developmental goals. Yet, in Nigeria, the link between administration and development is often weak or disrupted, a situation warranting deeper scholarly attention. This issue is critical given the profound impact of corrupt administrative practices on national development. This study addresses a notable gap by focusing on the systemic, institutionalised, and endemic nature of administrative corruption. By analysing the interplay among corruption, administration and development in Nigeria, it contributes meaningfully to the existing discourse on the role of administration in fostering development. The next section examines the nature of corruption in Nigeria and its relationship to the focus of the study.

The nature of corruption

The nature and character of corruption is broadly divided into political corruption and bureaucratic corruption (Arowolo & Olaniyan, 2018). Political corruption takes place at the highest levels of political authority. It occurs when the politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws, are themselves corrupt. It also takes place when policy formulation and legislation is tailored to benefit political leadership. It can also include purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favours, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election. This practice has almost become a norm in Nigeria's political processes. Votes are either bought with money or secured through thuggery, intimidation of voters and violence (Arowolo, 2019). Electoral victory is no longer determined by one man one vote rule, but is largely determined through the level of intimidation and federal connection.

Another important nature of corruption is the one that occurs within the Nigeria's administrative setting (Arowolo & Olaniyan, 2018). This takes place in public administration, the implementation end of politics. It is often described as low-level or street-level corruption, representing the type that citizens encounter daily in hospitals, schools, police stations, immigration offices and other public institutions. Forms of administrative corruption include bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favouritism and nepotism. This type of corruption is the central concern of this study because of its resilience and ubiquity.

Unlike political corruption, which may have a shorter lifespan owing to changes in political leadership, administrative corruption is deeply entrenched. Public bureaucrats are career officers who spend their entire professional lives within the service; it is therefore akin to a "cradle-to-grave" phenomenon. It can also become contagious, especially when acts of wrongdoing go unchecked or unpunished. For this reason, the study identifies administrative corruption as a more potent and dangerous form of corruption capable of undermining development. Administrative corruption not only impedes development, it also weakens the administrative capacity to deliver essential services to citizens; this is the pathway through which it harms development. The next section examines the factors that drive administrative corruption through theoretical lens.

Theoretical exploration of administrative corruption in Nigeria

This study is anchored in Observational Learning Theory, originally developed by Albert Bandura (1965, 1969) and subsequently extended by scholars such as Deguchi (1984) and Greer, Dudek-Singer and Gautreaux (2020). Observational learning refers to a process through which individuals acquire behaviours, attitudes and emotional responses by watching and imitating others (McLeod, 2024). As Bandura (1965, 1969) explains, learning is fundamentally social and occurs through multiple interconnected processes rather than direct personal experience alone. According to Galanaki and Malafantis (2022), sustained learning of this nature in human societies typically requires the presence of a social model, often someone respected or regarded as authoritative, such as parents, peers, superiors or mentors. Loyalty to, and admiration for, such figures makes the internalisation of observed behaviour seamless and enduring.

Within organisational settings, models are usually individuals occupying positions of authority or higher status. Observational Learning Theory therefore provides a useful analytical lens for examining how corruption reproduces itself within administrative systems. In contexts where corrupt practices by superiors are visible and unpunished, subordinates are likely to observe, internalise and replicate such behaviours. Over time, this process undermines institutional integrity and weakens state capacity for effective service delivery.

The theory explains behavioural acquisition through four interrelated stages: attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. Attention constitutes the initial stage, during which the observer notices and focuses on a particular behaviour exhibited by the model. Retention follows, involving the mental encoding and storage of the observed behaviour through imagery or symbolic representation.

Reproduction refers to the individual's capacity to translate what has been retained into actual behaviour, demonstrating the ability to perform the observed act. The final stage, motivation, concerns the incentive to replicate the behaviour, especially when it is associated with rewards or the absence of sanctions (Cherry, 2025; McLeod, 2024; Stone, 2024). Behaviour is more likely to be imitated when the model benefits from it or avoids punishment, thereby serving as an inducement to the observer (Bandura et al., 1966).

The relevance of Observational Learning Theory to this study lies in its capacity to illuminate the dynamics of administrative corruption in Nigeria, where corrupt practices are often perceived as profitable and rarely attract meaningful punitive measures. Individuals who engage in corruption frequently accumulate wealth, social prestige and political influence, and are, in some instances, publicly celebrated through honours or traditional titles. Such outcomes reinforce corruption as a viable and desirable behaviour. Through observational learning, corrupt practices spread beyond isolated acts and become entrenched within administrative culture via what may be described as a diffusion chain. In this process, a subordinate learns corrupt behaviour by observing a superior regarded as a model, while others in turn learn from that subordinate, allowing corruption to diffuse across the organisation. Over time, this pattern crystallises into a culture that obstructs development-oriented initiatives and erodes the capacity of public bureaucracy to fulfil its foundational mandate.

While Observational Learning Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding behavioural patterns and the replication and escalation of corrupt conduct, its analytical scope is not exhaustive. The theory places primary emphasis on individual models and behavioural imitation within organisational contexts, often underplaying the influence of broader factors such as organisational structure, political leadership posture and the wider institutional environment. Nevertheless, it effectively captures the core concern of this study: the relationship between learned behavioural patterns and the replication and intensification of administrative corruption within the Nigerian administrative setting. This behavioural transmission plays a decisive role in sustaining corrupt practices that weaken administrative efficiency and impair the capacity of the state to deliver essential social services. Building on this theoretical orientation, the next section examines the relationship between administrative corruption and national development in Nigeria.

Administrative corruption and national development in Nigeria: The nexus

There is a symbiotic relationship between administrative corruption and national development in Nigeria. This relationship is multifaceted and has pervasive effects across all sectors of the economy. Although endowed with abundant natural and human resources, the Nigerian economy has struggled to convert these endowments into widespread prosperity. This is largely due to endemic administrative corruption, which diverts public resources away from productive investment and undermines the institutional capacity required for development (Chatham House, 2025). This assertion aligns with recent studies compiled by the World Bank (2023). According to the World Bank (2023), the prevailing business-as-usual approach to governance and enterprise discourages investment and innovation, leading to low fiscal revenues, inefficient spending and significant leakages due to weakened institutional capacity.

Consequently, socio-economic inequities and poverty are exacerbated, economic growth is hindered and capital formation is constrained. According to PwC (2022), high levels of corruption also undermine foreign direct investment and impede the ease of doing business, with Nigeria currently ranking 169th out of 190 on the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index (World Bank, 2023). Elevated corruption rates contribute to higher prices and inflation, while public institutions remain underfunded and burdened with bureaucratic inefficiencies, largely due to the proliferation of middlemen operating within entrenched practices. Comparative analyses suggest that if corruption were substantially reduced, Nigeria could gain up to approximately $534 billion in additional GDP by 2030. Nigeria currently ranks 140th on the Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating very high levels of corruption (Transparency International, 2025b; PwC, 2022).

Nigeria's ranking of 140 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index underscores the severity of governance challenges facing the country, despite significant anti-graft efforts (Reuters, 2025). Corruption exerts a strong drag on economic growth and productivity. Analyses by PricewaterhouseCoopers estimate that corruption could cost up to 37 per cent of Nigeria's GDP by 2030 if left unchecked, equating to approximately $2,000 per person by that year (PwC, 2022). This occurs through multiple channels, including reduced government effectiveness, smaller tax revenues, estimated at only around 8 per cent of GDP, one of the lowest among comparable countries, and diminished foreign direct investment due to unpredictability and opaque business environments (PwC, 2022). Corruption also weakens domestic and foreign investor confidence, leading to lost opportunities for job creation and economic diversification.

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, contributing over 20 per cent of GDP and employing a large segment of the population, particularly in rural areas. However, corruption undermines agricultural development by distorting policy implementation, reducing funding efficiency and facilitating resource leakages in key programmes and subsidies (Omoniyi, Adamu & Oyelayo, 2025). Chronic underfunding, often exacerbated by leakages and rent-seeking behaviour, affects essential services such as extension support, research and rural infrastructure, leaving them inadequate. This, in turn, depresses productivity and exacerbates food insecurity, despite Nigeria's considerable arable land and agricultural potential.

Another effect of administrative corruption is its impact on the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) (Yusuf, 2025). This is particularly significant because Nigeria operates a largely monolithic economy that depends heavily on oil as its principal source of revenue for funding critical infrastructural projects. Despite having four national refineries, Nigeria has been unable to refine its own crude oil. These refineries have become moribund largely as a result of excessive and reckless corruption (Ochojila, 2025). Turnaround maintenance has been carried out on the four facilities in the past, with recent maintenance on the Port Harcourt refinery alone consuming billions of dollars without yielding any tangible success.

In addition, the oil subsidy scam has consumed enormous national resources. Shortly before the removal of the fuel subsidy, Nigeria was reportedly spending about 96 per cent of its revenue on debt servicing and payments to oil marketers who imported refined petrol, which the government subsidised at a very high cost (BusinessDay Nigeria, 2025). Not only did the refineries remain non functional despite the expenditure of billions of dollars on their repairs, the subsidy claims were also inflated, and the imported petrol was often of substandard quality (Izuaka, 2025). Consequently, the government lost revenue at both ends. Administrative corruption in the oil sector has prevented the NNPC from remitting funds into the coffers of the federal government (Yusuf, 2025) and has, in turn, undermined the government's capacity to provide essential social services to the people.

The educational sector is also affected by administrative corruption. This is reflected in skewed admission processes, corrupt grading systems that do not reflect students' performance, misappropriation and poor governance of education budgets, and a host of other factors that have left millions of Nigerian children without adequate schooling resources (Madaki, 2019). Reports indicate that billions of naira intended for educational infrastructure have been diverted or misused, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, decaying facilities and significant numbers of out-of-school children. UNICEF data suggest that approximately 10.5 million Nigerian children are out of school, the highest figure globally, with corruption cited as one of the contributing factors to low resource availability and poor educational outcomes (UNICEF, 2021).

The health sector is not spared, as corruption in healthcare administration severely compromises service delivery and health outcomes. Funds meant for hospitals and clinics are frequently siphoned off, leading to under-equipped facilities, shortages of essential medicines and high out-of-pocket costs for patients (SERAP, 2021). The result is a system where many Nigerians are unable to access basic healthcare, contributing to high morbidity and mortality rates from preventable conditions (Donatus, 2025). This

further entrenches poverty, as families incur catastrophic health expenditures that push them deeper into economic hardship (Kankeu & Ventelou, 2025).

Beyond specific sectors, corruption has pervasive effects on public services and poverty reduction. Systemic corruption has been linked to widespread poverty, with reports noting that corruption in ministries, departments and agencies, particularly those responsible for health, education and water, has pushed millions further into deprivation (SERAP, 2021). Funds earmarked for critical social services frequently fail to reach intended beneficiaries, eroding trust in public institutions and diminishing citizens' confidence in government (Njoku, Mbionwu & Njoku, 2025). This erosion of institutional trust and legitimacy undermines social cohesion, fuels grievances, and indirectly contributes to insecurity and political instability.

The cumulative effect of corruption across these sectors is to constrain Nigeria's national development. Corruption weakens institutional capacity, distorts public policy, and shifts focus away from long-term human capital investment towards short-term rent-seeking. Poor governance and persistent corruption thus lead to inequitable development, where only the elite, who are disproportionate in number, benefit while the majority of citizens face limited opportunities and persistent deprivation. The interaction of corruption with socio-economic indicators, including poverty, unemployment and limited access to quality education and healthcare, underscores how deeply corruption impairs efforts to achieve sustainable and inclusive development.

This section has demonstrated the relationship between administrative corruption and national development in Nigeria. It has shown how corruption is closely linked to underdevelopment across key sectors of the economy, including education, agriculture, health and poverty alleviation. The analysis highlights the asymmetric relationship between budgetary allocations and the actual services delivered to the population, confirming the central premise of this study: administrative corruption facilitates the diversion of public resources for personal gain. The consequences for national development are both practical and symbolic, as corruption undermines development initiatives, weakens institutional capacity, limits employment opportunities and exacerbates poverty, thereby reinforcing insecurity in the country. The following section, the conclusion, draws its recommendations from the findings presented here.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the nexus between administrative corruption and national development in Nigeria, highlighting a relationship that cripples the administrative capacity of the public bureaucracy. The myriad consequences of administrative malfeasance on the economy, health, education, agriculture and poverty reduction initiatives were brought to the fore, showing how corruption exacerbates insecurity across the country. The study's findings align with those of Chatham House (2025) and Reuters (2025), which identify corruption as the central factor undermining the ability of the public service to fulfil its fundamental responsibility of delivering essential services to citizens.

The core argument of the study is that, despite the symbiotic relationship between public bureaucracy and national development, growth and prosperity continue to elude Nigeria due to pervasive administrative corruption. The current study's finding that corruption diverts budgetary allocations to fund personal interests and aggrandisement aligns with the findings of PwC (2022) and Njoku, Mbionwu and Njoku (2025), which indicate that, despite substantial capital expenditures, progress in national development remains limited and that resources allocated for critical infrastructure have either been misappropriated or mismanaged by top bureaucrats acting in concert with selected members of the ruling elite.

Paradoxically, increases in capital expenditure have not translated into developmental outcomes, suggesting that higher budgets may, in some cases, exacerbate corruption. This raises a critical question: why does Nigeria continue to experience infrastructural decay and sectoral underdevelopment despite significant financial outlays? The answer lies in the disconnect between funding and performance,

which requires a holistic approach to resolve. In this regard, the study proposes a three-pronged strategy: institutional, procedural and psychological.

Institutionally, there is an urgent need to strengthen anti-corruption agencies and ensure their independence from the whims of political officeholders. Anti-corruption units should be embedded within public organisations, superior to and independent of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Efforts should be fairly rewarded, infractions should be strictly punished and ingenuity should be encouraged and recognised. Salaries must be paid promptly and commensurate with effort, with promotion and other incentives prioritised. Additionally, public servants should receive continuous training and education on the fundamentals of anti-corruption and the detrimental effects of corruption on national development. Whistleblowing initiatives should be revitalised, with robust legal and physical protections established for those exposing corrupt practices.

Procedurally, government operations should be computerised to minimise paper-based and face-to-face transactions that facilitate corruption. Online payment systems and digital records can enhance accountability, while appointments in the civil service should be strictly merit-based to reduce inefficiency. The government should leverage technology to increase transparency, including digital fund tracking, e-procurement systems and real-time reporting of expenditures. Legal and punitive measures must be strengthened to ensure that corrupt officials, irrespective of rank or position, face justice. Existing anti-corruption laws should be reviewed and updated to address the evolving nature of administrative corruption, including the imposition of long custodial sentences for severe offences.

Psychologically, there is a need to change public attitudes towards corruption. National enlightenment and moral renaissance campaigns should be implemented across the country, reaching every region and community. Campaign messages, translated into all major Nigerian languages, should be clear, concise and emotionally resonant, particularly targeting the youth. These initiatives must emphasise the social costs of corruption and the benefits of integrity and lawful conduct, cultivating a national culture that rejects corruption.

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