



## The United States of America and The Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria, 2015-2020: A Critical Analysis

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**Abstract.** Corruption as a major blight of most developing states around the world is an endemic that has systematically eaten deep into the core of Nigeria as a system. Considering selected approaches to tackle corruption in Nigeria since 1999, the expository design was adopted to appraise the efforts of the United States (US) in the anti-corruption operations in Nigeria. The study confirmed that Nigeria has the highest stake in its anti-corruption struggles. It concluded that Nigeria and the US can work together against corruption in Nigeria. However, Nigeria's expectations of the US in this regard should be moderate, in recognition of the latter's interest. Although the US has projected interest in the anti-corruption fight in Nigeria in many high-profile discussions, the study recommended that the US should begin to make its efforts believable by dissociating itself from corrupt Nigerian elites. In furtherance of its anti-corruption drive, the US should also be confrontational through rigorous questioning of funds laundered to be spent or invested in the US.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Anti-corruption, Nigeria, United States (US), Developing States

### 1. Introduction

Corruption contributes a great deal to the socio-economic and political plights of developing countries around the world. It is the social plague that holds the people's progress to ransom. It militates against infrastructural growth and economic development through misappropriation and diversion of public funds and government revenues for private (selfish) use by corrupt political and economic elites, thereby impoverishing the mass majority (Otusanya, 2011). Corruption can take different forms. However, a broad categorization includes petty corruption,

which involves government workers taking bribes for carrying out their jobs like issuing forms and licenses, etc. This category of corruption is usually not projected seriously and, in fact, often normalized as a necessary ritual or appeasement to get things done quickly (and easily) – the proverbial greasing of palms. There is also the downright diversion of government revenues to private coffers (Nwabuzor, 2005). Other forms of corruption are vote-buying, nepotism in recruitment and promotion in the public sector, etc. {United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), 2019}. Nevertheless, all forms of corruption have their ways of negatively impacting a polity in the long run.

Although political corruption in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-colonial and colonial eras, corruption in post-colonial Nigeria has grown to become a bane in its system; it has come to be identified with the country. Corruption is believed to be the bedrock and core of Nigeria's misadministration (Nmah, 2017; Nwogbo, & Ighodalo, 2021). It has to do with the abuse or misuse of authorized power for selfish benefits (Transparency International (TI), 2020). This could be in form of giving or taking bribes, diversion of public funds, neglect of duties, and general maladministration. These corrupt practices frustrate democratic principles, promote governmental instability, and stunt economic growth. Economic growth is further stunted due to discouragement of foreign direct investments and small businesses often hardly survive the start-up costs required in a corrupt society (Awareness Days, 2020). This results in poverty and loss of trust in the government due to hindered institutional development.

It is important to note that corruption, in all its ramifications, constitutes the basic justification for all

military overthrow of civilian rules in Nigeria. In his 1966 coup speech, Major Kaduna Nzeogwu noted that the military overthrow of the Balewa-led government was to correct the social malaise perpetrated by “the political profiteers, swindlers, and men in high and low places who seek bribes and demand ten percent...” (quoted in Nwoke, 2013:57). However, it is ironic that on a much higher scale, the same massive looting, mismanagement of public funds, favoritism, and other forms of corrupt practices were evident in all the succeeding military regimes in Nigeria (Abada & Ngwu, 2019). With the return to democratic government in 1999, there were hopes of quality leadership to address corruption’s corrosive and pernicious hold on Nigeria. Two decades of democratic rule, notwithstanding, corruption is still as pervasive in Nigeria as it was used to be (Abada & Ngwu, 2019) and perhaps, more chronic and subtle.

Successive governments had taken stringent measures – through policies and laws – against this cankerworm. One of such was Muhammadu Buhari’s War against Indiscipline (WAI), from 1983 to 1985. Prominent among subsequent efforts to combat corruption since 1999 is the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2000 and 2003 respectively under President Olusegun Obasanjo’s administration (Nmah, 2017). Upon return to power again in 2015, Muhammadu Buhari restated his commitment to stamp out corruption and corrupt practices as a cardinal programme, as he inaugurated the Presidential Advisory Council Against Corruption (PACAC) chaired by the eminent Prof. Itse Sagay. It is important to add that Nigeria’s new anti-corruption crusade under President Muhammadu Buhari, tagged “change begins with me”, is a necessary step to resuscitate discipline, fairness, orderliness, and zero corruption in Nigeria (Oludayo, 2021; Faseke, 2021).

It is equally gratifying to note that with the exit of the military, the United States (US) has been partnering with Nigeria against corruption since the dawn of the fourth republic. This is evident in the US Government’s support of Nigerian efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote good governance, counter corruption, and improve security in Nigeria (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Despite this partnership, corruption continues to reign with a significant negative effect on political and economic relations between the two countries. Corruption has jeopardized Nigeria’s foreign direct investments (FDI), including U.S investments in the country’s

economy, security, and governance (Page, 2016; U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Notwithstanding reforms aimed at checkmating corruption in Nigeria, the 2017 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index puts Nigeria as the 148th most corrupt country in the world out of 180 countries evaluated (Nwogbo, & Ighodalo, 2021). By 2020, Nigeria was ranked 149 out of 175 countries (U.S. Department of State, 2021). This shows that efforts, both local and international, towards fighting corruption in Nigeria are yet to be productive. This is worrisome, as Adisa, (2021) suggests that this reality exists due to a gap in the moral commitment of leaders and state power to the fight against corruption in Nigeria. This gap is also evident in the effort and attitude of the US in helping the struggle against corruption in the country. One might beg to understand the extent of the moral commitment of the US in the anti-corruption struggle in Nigeria, considering the U.S has paid more lip service than actual actions to discourage corrupt practices, especially among politicians and government officials.

Because the United States of America (USA) remains the largest foreign investor in Nigeria, with \$3.2 billion in exportation to Nigeria in 2019, (U.S Department of State, 2021), U.S policymakers deemed it important to support President Buhari’s aggression against corruption. However, thus far, USA’s efforts are yet to generate policy actions with actions that distance it from corrupt politicians. The efforts of the US have been limited to public speeches and high-level discussions (Page, 2016), which have not deterred corrupt political office holders from engaging in corrupt practices such as diversions of public funds and misuse of their posts to the detriment of the masses. Since independence, corruption has remained a major challenge for the attainment of economic growth and development in the country.

Following this background, this paper examines the role of the USA in the fight against corruption in Nigeria from 2015 to 2020, and what this role translates for Nigeria and the USA. The paper studies the effectiveness of the support of the USA through the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. To achieve this study, realism Colonialism and the Two Publics theories were adopted as a framework of analysis. Methodologically, this research is qualitative thus, the major source of data includes relevant books, journals, newspapers, and online materials gotten through the internet. The researcher makes use of

archival information, internet browsing, etc. as methods of data collection for this study. The study contributes to knowledge by exploring how the anti-corruption fight in Nigeria can be mutually beneficial for Nigeria and the USA.

The next two sections of this paper explored the theoretical frameworks of analysis of the study. The section that follows interrogates the causes and effects of corruption in Nigeria. This is followed by a brief analysis of selected efforts to curb corruption in Nigeria; the roles and impacts of the ICPC, the EFCC, and the US in the process are explained. This is immediately followed by the findings and summary of the study and recommendations for a mutually beneficial anti-corruption effort in Nigeria.

## **2. The U.S and Anti-Corruption Struggles in Nigeria: The Realist's Framework of Analysis**

The realist's school of thought holds that human beings set out to maximize their gains, even at the expense of others. Prominent among classical realist scholars are: Thucydides, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Max Weber (Bell, 2017). They all simply agreed that humans live in anarchy, a stateless system where life is brutish, harsh, and short. Hans Morgenthau is one of the realist scholars of international relations, some others are Raymond Aron, Edward Hallet Carr, Robert Gilpin, John Herz, Samuel Huntington, George Kennan, Stephen Krasner, and Kenneth Waltz. They all believe that just like humans are interested in the attainment of power to dominate others; states in international politics also strive to attain as much power as they can to coerce others (Griffiths, Roach, and Solomo, 2009).

Taking a cue from Niccolo Machiavelli's idea of "the end justifies the means", the "how" is not as important as the attainment of the desired result. In this case, the desired result is power, which could be political, economic, military, etc. (Griffiths, et al, 2009). The realist's perspective directly opposes the idealist's philosophy of bringing states under an international organization to ensure that they relate cordially to enhance peace. This idea birthed the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919, after World War I. However, with the outbreak of World War II, the idea of international organization as a means to avert war was broken (Akinbobola, 2008). This was what gave the realist's view momentum after the Second World War, through the works of Edward Hallet Carr (Bell, 2017; Gold & McGlinchey, 2017).

Bell (2017: para. 3) noted that E.H. Carr "focused on the perennial role of power and self-interest in determining state behaviour". He observed that states do not jump into international relations or politics without a prior domesticated plan or rules of engagement (Bell, 2017). This is called the foreign policy of the state, which is always structured to protect the interest of the state, otherwise called national interest (Griffiths, et al, 2009). States relate with other states based on what they stand to gain, and realistically, at no point would a state engage with another when there are no 'payoffs'.

Considering the realists' idea that states only relate with other states based on what they stand to gain, it will then suffice to wonder what the U.S. would gain in the active fight against corruption in Nigeria. Instead of confronting corruption head-on, so far, the US agencies and officials seem to be more "concerned with cultivating strong relationships with a wide range of elites, including those complicit in corruption" (Page, 2016:2). Consequently, Page further described the US anti-corruption policy as "broad-based and untargeted, centered on modest assistance programmes for police investigators and civil society watchdogs" (Page, 2016:2). The US officials are alleged to enjoy the friendships of some controversial Nigerian officials. An example of this is the USAID's sponsorship of a rice farming "...project owned by a former attorney-general whom the United States sanctioned for corruption in 2010. In April 2016, the US ambassador and USAID officials visited and toured the farm with the owner" (Page, 2016:2). One can be justified to think that a cordial relationship must have existed between the sanctioned Nigerian and the US for the USAID to have sponsored his rice project.

Available measures like the consular databases, local law enforcement records, or online searches have not been employed by the US officials against enabling corruption in Nigeria. (Page, 2016). Cordial relationships with Nigerian corrupt officials seem to benefit the U.S. and other European countries where they take their loots to enjoy. To buttress this point, Page (2020) wonders "why politically exposed Nigerians suspected of corrupt practices enjoy near-total freedom to spend their unexplained wealth on the high-end property, private schools, and luxury goods in the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe" (para. 17). As long as they can afford it, Nigerian politicians are not questioned about the

sources of the money they spend. Prominent Nigerian politicians send their children to the best of schools and own houses in the U.S. and other places while the masses have to make do with a degraded educational system and poor housing in the country.

On September 14, 2020, Nigerian politicians that were involved in malpractices and responsible for violence in the 2019 general elections were issued a visa ban by the United States Department (Egbunike, 2020). However, their names were not made public, this has made some Nigerians question the reason behind this move and some wonder if any politician was banned since there are no names to back their claims (Egbunike, 2020). This even became more questionable in 2013 when a Nigerian former minister's visa was almost revoked, but for a "...senior embassy official who claimed that doing so would put US oil companies' business dealings at risk" (p. 2). This goes to show the kind of tepid approach of the US to corruption in Nigeria. In reality, the US may not be able to effectively fight corruption in Nigeria as far as the corruption has no direct adverse effect on it. It is hoped that appeal to common humanity could constitute a "gain" to drive a more assertive US anti-corruption posture

### **3. The U.S and Anti-Corruption Struggles in Nigeria: Peter Ekeh's Colonialism and Two Publics Theoretical Framework**

Peter Ekeh (1975) proposed the Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa theory to explain and analyze corruption in Africa. Ekeh referred to African politicians as bourgeoisies, a class of privileged persons who wield more power than authorities. He observed that the movements for independence from colonialism were primarily a power struggle between the African and European bourgeoisie. The African bourgeoisie used their western education to organize the masses to support the struggle for independence, which was not entirely in the interests of the people. The African bourgeoisie were more interested in the replacement of the colonialists – the European bourgeoisie – in the governance of African colonies.

To describe an African's relationship with the postcolonial state and primordial community, Ekeh (1975) identified two publics in Africa. He referred to them as the civic public and the primordial public, typifying the colonial and traditional institutions respectively (Ekeh, 1975; Onuoha, 2014). Colonialism originated in the two publics and the

dialectical interactions between these publics are responsible for many of Africa's political issues, especially corruption (Ekeh, 1975). While villages/rural communities, traditional groups/associations, and religious groups are all part of the primordial public, the civic public is all colonial or offspring of colonial institutions. The complexity in African politics is found in the morality or lack of it thereof in Africans' interaction with the two publics; Africans relate to the civic public without moral considerations and to the primordial public on moral grounds.

Africans viewed the colonial state with doubts and questioned its morality. They preferred and are more comfortable with the virtues and communality created by Africa's kinship ties, unlike what they perceived as self-centered European morality prescribed by the colonialists (Goddard, Assad, Issa, Malagila, & Mkasiwa, 2016). The colonial institutions are seen as alien, foreign, and unfamiliar by Africans, as such, they reap from the civic public to enrich the primordial public (Ekeh, 1975). However, in contemporary times, contrary to the postulations of Ekeh, the primordial public, and the civic public is being ripped-off by corrupt African politicians to enrich the economic growth of the privileged few. This is evident in how public funds diverted or embezzled by corrupt politicians are used to enjoy vacations, go for health care, buy houses, invest and or school in places like Britain, America, Canada, etc., with no regard or pity for the "primordial public".

### **4. Corruption as an Endemic in Nigeria: Causes and Effects**

Considering the pervasiveness of corruption in Nigeria, there have to be reasons for this reality. Shuaib (2015 as cited in Khan, nd) identified three levels from which the causes of corruption can be traced. They are; International, National, and Individual levels.

**International Level:** this level highlights the competitive nature of the international market to be the major cause of corruption in Nigeria. In this case, multinationals are willing to give bribes to gain favour over their competitors. "The Siemens scandal, the National Identity Card saga, and Halliburton case are some of the corruption cases involving international companies in Nigeria." (Shuaib, 2015, p. 28).

**National Level:** identified under this level are three types of relationships, namely: elected and appointed government official (government) and the civil

service, the relationship between government and the judiciary, and third; the relationship between government and the civil society/private organization or individuals. “What comes to mind here is connivance and privileges. This could be when awarding contracts or giving concessions for economic reasons or granting of rights (such as privatization of government-owned businesses)” (Shuaib, 2015, p. 29).

**Individual Level:** the basis for corruption at this level is identified as “competition between and among different classes of individual and the tendency to acquire more to gain advantage and retain one's position or aspire for a higher position.” (Shuaib, 2015, p. 29). This explains why political elites engage in corrupt activities such as: “diversion of public resources, collection of mobilization fees without execution of the project or abandonment of projects when the amount for the project has been paid or poor execution of the project, a culture of affluent and get rich syndrome” (Shuaib, 2015, p. 29).

From these levels, one can deduce greed as a major cause of corruption in Nigeria. Okwuagbala, (2020) identified four causes of corruption, they are Greed, Poor youth empowerment, Poverty, and Unemployment. Greed, he argued is one of the reasons politicians embezzle public revenue; they feel the need to amass as much wealth as possible at all costs. Poor youth empowerment Okwuagbala, (2020) argued has to do with inadequate moral and financial empowerment of the youth. For instance, finances that could have been invested in education are misappropriated, and seeing, stealing and mismanagement at the top, the youth begin to emulate in their own corners, what they see practiced by the “leaders”.

Also, Arowosegbe, (2017) observed that the perception of government and or political offices as a business instead of an avenue to serve has contributed to the ruthless striving for kick-backs in the forms of returns and rewards; the absence of institutions in the governance processes, which makes the building of state activities and practices dependent on individuals, rather than institutions, possible; the lack of accountability in the democratic political process; the absence of austere and painstaking dedication to developing the economy and society; and the perception of political rule as rite de passage, such that there is no tolerance for either dissent politics or even a critical questioning culture (Arowosegbe, 2017:130-131).

As a result of all these, ethics and morality are undermined, thereby, weakening social order and even, Nigeria as a system (Arowosegbe, 2017).

Other causes of corruption explained by Okwuagbala, (2020) are poverty and unemployment. When a person lives below 1.90 dollars, which is about 723 naira per day (Like Forex, 2020), such is said to be poor. Unfortunately, many Nigerians fall in this category, and a contributory factor to the high poverty rate is unemployment. These factors make many Nigerian ready and willing to do anything; including stealing, to earn a living. These are parts of the reasons poor, unemployed youths collect bribes to be thugs for politicians (Okwuagbala, 2020).

On the effects of corruption in Nigeria, Šumah, (2018) stated that government officials manipulate public expenditure to gain extra income for themselves. Supporting this claim, Okenna, (2020) observed that a relationship exists between corruption and government expenditure in Nigeria. He pointed out that an increase in the level of corruption will lead to an increase in government expenditure. It can, therefore, be gathered that an effect of corruption in Nigeria is increased expenditure. Another effect of corruption mentioned by him is poverty, just as poverty could cause corruption; it is at the same time a resultant effect of corruption. It is indeed “a locust that has eaten deep into the Nigerian economy; it has stolen the wealth of resource-rich nations like Nigeria thereby making people to be trapped in poverty.” (Okenna, 2020:42).

Corruption leads to brain drain as poor working conditions and inadequate remunerations make professionals seek greener pasture beyond the shores of the country “as many Nigerians believe it is profitable to work outside Nigeria” (Shuaib, 2015:31). Shuaib went further to opine that corruption:

*desecrates the rule of law and distorts the entire decision-making process, undermines the credibility and legitimacy of government. Even, those who tried to expose corrupt activities find themselves to blame as they can be dealt with and the culprits walk away without being punished (p. 31).*

All of these factors contribute to the country's negative image in the international system, resulting in restricted foreign and domestic investment, democratic undermining, and general underdevelopment (Nmah, 2017). With low investment comes increased unemployment and poor national development due to low productivity (Nmah, 2017; Okwuagbala, 2020).

### 5. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC)

Since 1999, there have been measures to combat corruption and ensure a saner society; such efforts are the establishment of the ICPC and EFCC (Mikail, et al., 2017). Suleiman, et al., (2017) opined that upon coming into existence, the EFCC became the financial intelligent unit saddled with the responsibility of coordinating all other anti-corruption bodies in the fight against corruption and all other financial crimes in the country. Highlighting the duties of the EFCC, Mikail, et al., (2017) stated that the EFCC is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of financial and economic crimes such as money laundering, counterfeiting, market fraud, illegal transfer of funds, contract scam, computer credit fraud, forgery, etc. By instilling fear of conviction and punishment, the commission strives to ensure a corruption-free Nigeria.

The EFCC has been tagged the most promising effort of the Nigerian government under President Obasanjo, to fight corruption. This is due to the fact that “the EFCC is the only Nigerian government institution that has posed a meaningful challenge to the impunity enjoyed by corrupt and powerful members of the political elite” (Albin-Lackey, 2011, para. 4). The first head of the commission, Nuhu Ribadu, did not shield from publicly declaring war against corrupt politicians. However, his record was dented with shreds of evidence that the operations of the EFCC were selective and highly influenced by his boss, President Obasanjo (Albin-Lackey, 2011; Mikail, et al., 2017). Ribadu was forced out of office two weeks after he attempted to prosecute a former governor of Delta State, James Ibori, a political ally of President Umaru Yar’Adua. Yar’Adua took over the presidency after President Obasanjo in 2007 (Albin-Lackey, 2011).

Farida Waziri replaced Ribadu as the chairman in 2007, and her reign also was highly controversial with allegations and pieces of evidence of poor investigations and handling of corruption cases. “Acts of spectacular incompetence ... afflicted the EFCC under both Ribadu and Waziri” (Albin-Lackey, 2011, para. 8). Waziri was believed to have gained the position of EFCC boss through support from James Ibori, George Akume, and Bukola Saraki. All these were politicians with cases of corruption at the time and still do even in 2020 (Sahara Reporter, 2020). This thereby made Waziri’s capability to be objective in her duties questionable.

She was alleged to have cleared James Ibori of corruption; the same Ibori that was “convicted of fraud and money laundering in the United Kingdom despite Nigeria’s failure to do so” (Sahara Reporter, 2020, para. 11). Due to allegations of a corrupt EFCC during Waziri’s tenure as the boss, the commission was tagged turbulent at the time and potential international partners and donors became weary of dealing with Nigeria and Nigerians. This goes to show that the actions of the EFCC under the leadership of Waziri contributed to denting the image of Nigeria in the international system.

On November 23, 2011, Farida Waziri was relieved of her duty by President Goodluck Jonathan and she was replaced with an acting chairperson, Ibrahim Lamorde (Ogala, 2015). His tenure was also marked with controversies, in 2015, following allegations of missing \$5bn (£3.2bn) in the EFCC by the Nigerian Senate. He was relieved of his post by President Muhammadu Buhari, succeeded by Ibrahim Magu in an acting capacity. Although the Nigerian Senate had, in 2016, authorized the Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions to issue a warrant of arrest on Lamorde for alleged financial misappropriation to the tune of N1trn during his administration, he was neither arrested nor prosecuted.

President Muhammadu Buhari appointed Ibrahim Magu as the new chairperson of the EFCC in an acting capacity in November 2015. However, the Nigerian Senate refused to confirm this appointment on the basis of some criminal allegations against him. It would be interesting to recall that despite the allegations, plus the refusal of the Nigerian Senate to confirm his appointment, Ibrahim Magu continued to perform the duties of the head of the EFCC (acting) until he was suspended following a major scandal that bothers on gross misconduct in July 2020. Substantively, he was succeeded by 42-year old Abdulrasheed Bawa in February 2021. The jury is still out on Bawa, whose tenure has been hard on political corruption and internet fraud (nicknamed “yahoo-yahoo”).

The EFCC has been collaborating with international agencies to ensure that economic and financial crimes are reduced in the country. For instance, in December 2019, the EFCC obtained the deportation of Mr. Mohammed Bello Adoke (SAN), Nigeria’s former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, from Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), on charges of alleged abuse of office and money laundering in connection with the granting of the Oil Prospecting License (OPL) 245 to Shell and ENI (the case

popularly known as the Malabu oil scam deal). Prior to his deportation, Adoke had been detained by Interpol in the same UAE since November 11, 2019. To some, Adoke's visit to Dubai for medical treatment was seen as an attempt to evade arrest, but the anti-graft agency collaborated with the International police and UAE authorities to ensure his arrest and deportation (Obiwuru, 2020).

In spite of EFCC's efforts under Magu to curb economic and financial crimes in Nigeria, just like others before him, he was criticized for using the commission to carry out the dictates of the Presidency. The EFCC under the leadership of Ibrahim Magu was believed to be out to weaken oppositions, and the major one, in this case, is the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP argued that the EFCC is not independent as most arrested politicians or targets are usually either member of the PDP or the party's supporters. Some of those in these categories are Bukola Saraki, former Senate President; Ayodele Fayose; Patience Jonathan; Sambo Dasuki; Raymond Dokpesi; Justice Walter Onnoghen, former Chief Justice of Nigeria; etc. (Obiwuru, 2020).

The PDP suggested that someone like Bola Tinubu, the National Leader of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), was alleged to have used bullion vans to convey huge sums of money to his Ikoyi home during the 2019 General Elections. Yet, he has never been arrested nor investigated by the EFCC. Instead, when asked about Tinubu's matter, Magu gave no comment and simply called for another question (Obiwuru, 2020). The potency of such claim notwithstanding, we believe that the culpability or otherwise of the above persons should be the paramount issue in analysis, and never their political affiliation. To do otherwise would amount to rationalizing corruption, clothed in political garb, especially when it is obvious that prominent members of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) – such as Babachir Lawal, Bala Ngilari, Orji Uzor Kalu, Stella Oduah, late Adebayo Alao-Akala, etc. – are also being tried, and possibly convicted, of corrupt charges. The Human Rights Watch, the United States of America-based group has condemned the EFCC, labeling it an agency that fights corruption with corrupt hands. It is also observed that the political system in Nigeria “rewards” rather than punishes corruption (Obiwuru, 2020). As long as this system is sustained, corruption will continue to thrive in the country.

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) is a “sister” anti-graft

agency charged with the responsibility of deterring corruption through public education and enforcement in the public and private sectors (Mikail, et al., 2017). Just like the EFCC, the ICPC aims to rid Nigeria of corrupt engagements. In fact, one finds it difficult to demarcate where the duty of one ends and where that of the other begins. In the words of Nmah (2017:121), “ICPC and EFCC have the duties of fighting corruption in Nigeria since their enactments and there was a general acceptance by majority of Nigerians”. Nigerians have mostly been in support of the anti-graft agencies since they came into existence. So far, their presence has been able to instill some level of deterrence among Nigerians.

However, and with turnout of events, some Nigerians alleged that ICPC and EFCC suddenly had become government's tools for vendetta to political oppositions, non-loyalists and perceived enemies. This development derailed the hitherto merits credited to the anti-corruption bodies, and most unfortunately also, such perception has endured to the political dispensation under the administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (Nmah, 2017:121).

Every government in Nigeria since 1999 has been accused of unleashing EFCC and ICPC on their political opponents, and the current government under President Muhammadu Buhari is not left out of such allegations. Supporting this claim, Obiwuru, (2020:55) asserted that “some people believe that the agency is being used by each government that comes to power, particularly the present Buhari's government, to weaken every opposition”. However, it is worthy of note that the ICPC has handled over 20,000 petitions since its establishment 20 years ago (Abubakar, 2020).

Following the similar aims of the ICPC and the EFCC to tackle corruption in Nigeria, President Buhari's political party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) on 12 May 2015 proposed the merging of the two agencies “to tackle graft in a new way that would be prompt, fearless and decisive” (Badet, et al., 2016:156). Although this would enable the government to reduce the cost of the fight against corruption, it remains a tall order, not the least because of vested interests and the rigid legislative process involved.

## **6. The United States (US) and the Anticorruption Fights in Nigeria**

The United States (US) and Nigeria maintain serious partnerships and collaboration in the efforts against

corruption in order to ensure a transparent, responsible, and accountable government in Nigeria (Young, 2016). This partnership is important because of the United States' professed commitment to fostering development in Nigeria, through the United State Agency for International Development (USAID). Also, the US as the largest foreign investor in the country (US Department of State, 2019) has the moral duty to strive against forces that could suffocate its productivity, prominent among which is corruption, having established that corruption is at the core of most underdeveloped states around the world.

It is worthy of note that Nigeria and the United States' relationship dated back to 1960 when Nigeria gained its independence from Britain. Following a series of military takeovers of civilian rule, the relationship between the countries whittled. However, with the commencement of Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, the relationship and cooperation between the two countries improved (U.S. Department of State, 2019). The U.S. Senate in September 21, 2000, during a senate hearing through Hon. Russell D. Feingold stated that the US has taken a strong interest in promoting the rule of law in Nigeria, while the Secretary of State designated Nigeria as one of four democracies deserving of special attention in the year 2000. The United States-Nigeria Joint Economic Partnership Committee was established to assist Nigeria's economic reform efforts, and support was rendered to President Obasanjo's unwavering commitment to fighting corruption and the initiatives he has made since assuming office (Senate Hearing 106-873, 2000, para. 27).

Arguably, the year 2000 marked the official start of the discussions by the US over its support for the anti-corruption struggle in Nigeria's fourth republic. The relationship between the countries is better fostered under the US-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC). This commission creates an avenue for high-level discussions between Nigeria and the U.S. The last one of such discussion was on February 3, 2020, in Washington D.C. (U.S. Department of State, 2021). The BNC meetings focus on important common interests of the countries, such as good governance and anti-corruption; trade and investment; development and food security; and security and forestallment of terrorism (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

The United States through the USAID collaborates with representatives of civil society and media firms in Nigeria to build "their internal management capacity and strengthen their ability to engage with

the government on issues of fiscal accountability, budget monitoring and transparency within extractive industries." (USAID Nigeria, 2020, para. 2). This would go a long way in making them strong forces to reckon with in their advocating for a more transparent government and democratic reform. Supporting this position, the U.S. Department of State (2019), stated that Nigeria is currently getting help from the U.S. government through foreign aid to strengthen democratic institutions, promote good governance, and fight corruption. At the heart of such intervention is the belief that democratic and transparent institutions would repel or, at least, minimize corruption.

Although the US policy in Nigeria since 1999 is focused on security cooperation, economic growth and development, and democracy and governance (Page, 2016), there have not been any serious or sincere direct confrontations of corruption in the country. By not directly confronting corruption, the United States has done little to prevent kleptocrats from weakening Nigeria's political, security, and economic institutions (Page, 2016). In other words, the current approach of the U.S. to corruption in Nigeria has not been able to effectively deter corrupt practices. This is because corruption in Nigeria is yet to be viewed as a potent threat to the USA, rather, it is regarded as secondary because it does not pose a direct threat to the USA's actualization of its policy objectives and interest (Page, 2016).

To support Page's critical view, the US has been consistent in identifying and prosecuting corruptly enriched individuals, particularly suspected of cybercrimes and other forms of transnational crimes. In this category of corrupt Nigerians are Ramon Abbas (*Hushpuppi*), Valentine Iro, Chukwudi Igbokwe, and Obinwanne Okeke (*Invictus Obi*), etc., prosecuted and convicted accordingly. However, a number of Nigerian politically exposed persons who either fled or escaped the country to avoid corruption trial and/or conviction have either been indicted or apprehended in the US or returned home to be prosecuted through bilateral or multilateral collaborations. This includes Senator Andy Uba (indicted), and Mr. Abidemi Rufai (arrested). The point is that the efforts of the US in the former category surpass the latter, ostensibly because the perceived American interest in the former could be directly threatened.

## 7. Findings

The findings of this study are briefly stated as follows:

Corruption has adversely affected Nigeria's socio-economic and political development, causing further institutional decay and breeding powerful individuals whose corruptly acquired wealth constitutes a serious clog in the wheel of successive administration's intention and action towards fighting corruption. A scenario of "corruption fighting back" and, many times, defeating the system.

In the struggle against corruption in Nigeria, the US has only put to the fore more words and policies, in terms of high-profile discussions against corruption, than actual actions to confront it. Thus, the US has not effectively contributed to the deterrence of "kleptocrats" from weakening Nigeria's political, security, and economic institutions.

Following from the above, the US does not view the anti-corruption struggle in Nigeria as primary, not the least because corruption in Nigeria does not have direct perverse implications on the US. It is rather shown to enrich the US economy through corruptly laundered and siphoned public resources. Instead, the corruption seems to be of benefit as corrupt government officials lavishly spend part of their loot in the US, buying properties, shopping, schooling their children, etc. As such, expecting the US to be more effective in the combat against corruption may remain unrealistic.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is apt to conclude that the fight against corruption in Nigeria is predominantly a domestic affair than it is external. Hence, the expectation on another country to be actively involved in curbing it should be lowered. Instead, the Nigerian government at all levels should re-strategize and embrace sincerity in creating a system that discourages misappropriation and embezzlement of public funds. This would mean that the government itself is not complicit, but only handicapped by saboteurs.

From the findings, the recommendations of this study are as follows:

- The many discussions of the U.S. on the corruption in Nigeria should begin to go beyond just policies but actions. This is the only way its efforts and intentions regarding the anti-corruption campaigns in the country can be trusted.
- The actions of the U.S. will begin to be noticeable when it begins to give more importance to the fight against corruption in

Nigeria and not just view it as secondary. This is because no matter the efforts of the U.S. to enhance development in Nigeria through the USAID, it may not bear much fruit as corruption in high and low places will jeopardize these efforts.

- Nigeria should take the front seat in the anti-corruption fight in the country, as corruption in Nigeria is first of all Nigeria's problem. It is highly illogical to expect a country to go against a system that benefits it. As such, whatever efforts the U.S. brings to the table, Nigeria should complement, relying substantially on domestic efforts/mechanisms to curb corruption in its system.

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