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"AN ASSESSMENT OF NIGERIA'S ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCIES: CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT"

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Abstract: Nigeria is faced with the problem of corruption. Successive governments in the country had established several anti-corruption agencies to investigate, prosecute and prevent corrupt practices across the public and private sectors. Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies include the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and others. This paper assessed the challenges confronting anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria and the implications of these challenges for national development. Using secondary sources, such as internet, academic journals, textbooks, legal statutes, government publications, periodicals and policy documents, the data were analysed using thematic-content analysis. The findings indicated that Nigeria's anti-graft institutions face deep-rooted structural and operational challenges that severely limit their effectiveness, especially in handling high-profile corruption cases. These limitations not only encourage impunity and diminish public trust in the justice system but also lead to the mismanagement of public resources, poor governance, and service delivery failures. Consequently, corruption becomes entrenched, exacerbating poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment across key sectors, while also undermining investor confidence, weakening democratic institutions, and endangering the country's socio-economic stability and development. The paper recommended comprehensive reforms to strengthen Nigeria's anti-graft efforts by ensuring the autonomy and capacity of agencies like the EFCC and ICPC through legal protections, adequate funding, and modern investigative tools. It also calls for an overhaul of the judicial system to expedite corruption cases, including the creation of special courts, strict case timelines, and improved judicial accountability, all aimed at restoring public trust and reinforcing the rule of law.

Keywords: Anti-Corruption Agencies, Challenges, Implications, National Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption continues to pose a serious threat globally (Igwe, 2025; Babasola, 2020). The First Pension Custodian (2022) conceptualised corruption as any form of abuse of entrusted power for personal gain and may include but is not limited to bribery. In Africa, especially in Nigeria, corruption has deeply infiltrated nearly every aspect of national life (Nnorom, 2019), weakening institutional performance, eroding public confidence, and hindering development (Igwe, 2025; Adamaagashiet *al.*, 2023). It stands as Nigeria's most pressing obstacle to sustainable development (Asangausung & Brown, 2025; Ikpeze, 2013). Although various anti-corruption bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) have been established, corruption remains widespread and often goes unaddressed (Azeez & Ajibowu-Yekini, 2018). These agencies were designed to investigate, prosecute, and prevent corrupt activities (Jamiu, 2021), yet their effectiveness has been compromised by structural weaknesses, operational inefficiencies, and political interference (Ikpeze, 2013). Reflecting this ongoing challenge,

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Nigeria ranked 140th out of 180 countries on the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International (Igwe, 2025).

The persistence of high-profile corruption cases and the apparent inability of anti-graft agencies to secure timely and effective prosecutions raise serious concerns about the institutional capacity and integrity of Nigeria's anti-corruption framework (Adamaagashi *et al.*, 2023). To fight against corruption, successive governments have established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). Other agencies include the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) and Public Complaints Commission.

These agencies play a crucial role in preventing, investigating and prosecuting corruption cases in Nigeria. The ICPC and EFCC, in particular, have been established to address corruption within the public sector and the private sector, respectively. The ICPC, for instance, has the power to seize assets of public officials accused of corruption and to demand financial information (Asangausung and Brown, 2025). The establishment of these agencies is a testament to Nigeria's commitment to combating corruption, a challenge that has long been a concern for the country. While these agencies have made strides in addressing corruption, challenges remain and ongoing efforts are needed to further strengthen anti-corruption measures and promote a culture of integrity. Recently, Sanni (2021) reported that over the last two decades, Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies have arrested, investigated and prosecuted suspects and recovered roughly N900 billion (about \$2.2 billion) in stolen assets. This effort is not enough compared to the level of corruption in the country.

Scholars such as Ekweremadu (2021) have argued that despite formal legal mandates, anti-graft agencies suffer from chronic underfunding, lack of skilled personnel and weak enforcement capacity. These limitations are compounded by the politicisation of anti-corruption efforts, which often results in selective investigations and prosecutions based on political interests rather than legal merit. Azeez and Ajibowu-Yekini (2018) affirm that while the EFCC and Code of Conduct Bureau have recorded notable achievements, the ICPC's relatively sluggish approach underscores the uneven performance among anti-corruption institutions. This disparity reflects deeper systemic issues including overlapping mandates, inter-agency rivalry and lack of a unified strategy in combating graft.

Ewaet *al.* (2019) highlights internal weaknesses such as poor commitment to ethical standards, accountability and transparency within the agencies themselves—factors that erode public trust and limit the scope for institutional reform. Furthermore, external societal dynamics and institutional shortcomings continue to constrain anti-graft efforts. Nnado and Ugwu (2015) observe that public apathy, lack of civic engagement and limited whistle-blower protections discourage citizens from reporting corruption. The absence of an effective witness protection system and the risk of victimisation have further curtailed public cooperation. Umoru-Oki (2019), in his comparative study of Nigeria and Uganda, contends that anti-corruption frameworks in both countries often fail due to weak policy implementation and a lack of sustained political will.

The impact of corruption extends beyond institutional inefficiencies to broader developmental consequences. Abu (2022) and Nwosu (2023) argue that the gap between Nigeria's robust legal frameworks and weak enforcement mechanisms renders anti-corruption efforts largely symbolic. This gap allows public officials to embezzle resources meant for critical sectors like education, healthcare and infrastructure, exacerbating poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. From a legal standpoint, the Jigawa State Ministry of Justice (2023) underscores how corruption compromises judicial integrity, delays

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justice delivery and contributes to insecurity by weakening the rule of law. Moreover, Olujobi (2023) highlights that even in revenue-generating sectors such as petroleum, anti-corruption statutes are ineffectively enforced, reflecting the larger problem of political interference and regulatory failure. Abomaye-Nimenibo (2022) adds that corruption perpetuates poor governance, moral decay and leadership failure, all of which inhibit economic growth and social stability.

Against this backdrop, this study addressed a critical gap in the literature by assessing the challenges confronting anti-graft institutions and assess their implications for national development, using recent secondary data. While existing studies have explored various structural, operational and societal obstacles to effective anti-corruption efforts, they often do so within specific institutional or temporal confines, lacking a unified framework that connects these challenges directly to national development outcomes. Moreover, much of the prior research predates recent policy shifts, institutional reforms and socio-political developments that may have reshaped the anti-corruption landscape.

By focusing on the current dynamics and integrating institutional analysis with developmental impact, this study moves beyond isolated critiques of agency performance to examine how systemic limitations, such as politicisation, inter-agency rivalry and legal enforcement gaps, collectively undermine governance, economic progress and social stability. In doing so, the study provides a timely and comprehensive reassessment of anti-graft efforts, offering fresh insights into how entrenched weaknesses in institutional frameworks are impeding Nigeria's developmental trajectory. This integrative and updated perspective is largely missing from earlier works, thereby positioning the study to make a valuable contribution to both academic discourse and policy formulation.

II. Conceptualisation and Literature Review

Anti-Corruption Agencies

Nigeria operates a multi-agency framework for combating corruption, with various institutions established to investigate, prosecute and prevent corrupt practices across the public and private sectors. Anti-corruption is defined as all measures and mechanisms for controlling corruption (Babasola, 2020). These measures and mechanisms include the establishment of anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) and Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU). Others include, the Public Complaints Commission (PCC), Special Investigation Panel (SIP), Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), Servicom (Civil Service Reform), Due Process Review and Public Procurement (DPRPP) and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI).

These agencies function based on distinct statutory mandates but are united in their objective of promoting ethical governance, transparency and accountability. Their core responsibilities include investigating financial crimes, prosecuting offenders, sanctioning defaulters and periodically conducting research to identify corruption risks. This enables the development of targeted strategies for curbing financial misconduct and enhancing integrity in public administration (Ayozie, 2025; Asangausung *et al.*, 2024; Abu, 2022).

In addition to enforcement, these agencies play a preventive and advisory role by formulating anti-corruption policies, monitoring compliance with due process in procurement and fostering public awareness and education on the consequences of corruption. Through these functions, they contribute to strengthening governance institutions and improving public trust in the Nigerian state. However, as Ikpeze

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(2013) observes, several challenges impede the effectiveness of these agencies. Key issues include human rights abuses, disobedience to court orders, executive manipulation through function-switching and a lack of inter-agency coordination, which often results in overlapping functions, duplication of efforts and institutional conflicts.

Corruption

Babasola (2020) observes that the concept of corruption is difficult to define. He defined corruption as an abuse of power for private gain. Scholars posited that the term corruption includes 'all the forms of improper or selfish exercise of power and influence attached to a public as well as private office'. The Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Act (LFN, 2000), submitted that corruption include bribery, fraud and other related offences. Offences punishable include: willful giving and receipt of bribes and gratification to influence a public duty, fraudulent acquisition and receipt of properties, deliberate frustration of investigation by the anti-corruption commission (ICPC), making false returns, making of false or misleading statements to the anti-corruption commission, attempts, conspiracies and abetments of offences under the Act.

National Development

National development is a comprehensive, holistic and dynamic process aimed at improving the overall well-being of a nation's citizens across multiple dimensions. It encompasses balanced progress in the economic, political, social, cultural, scientific, technological and ecological spheres of national life. According to Khosla (2019), it involves enhancing both individual and societal welfare through advancements in sectors such as industry, agriculture, education, health and governance.

As defined by India Free Notes (2019), national development includes integrated growth in public welfare, infrastructure and governance, tailored to a country's unique needs and contexts. This development process is not static but evolves with changing national goals and priorities. Adagbabiri and Okolie (2016) highlight the importance of sustainability and human dignity, arguing that national development should lead to both material and spiritual betterment, underpinned by the effective utilisation of a nation's resources for the common good.

Idike (2014) underscores that national development must lead to a reduction in inequality and promote the security of lives and property, ensuring that the majority of citizens experience tangible improvements in their quality of life. Similarly, Okeke and Idike (2016) stress that national development should foster social harmony, including the elimination of inter-ethnic antagonisms and the promotion of peaceful inter-group relations. Therefore, in the context of this study, national development refers to progressive and sustainable transformations in all critical facets of a nation's existence; economic, social, political, demographic, cultural, technological and ecological achieved in a way that safeguards both present and future generations.

Challenges of Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Agencies and Implications for National Development

The role of anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to the centrality of corruption in undermining national development. Although successive governments have established and empowered institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), evidence suggests that these agencies face significant structural, operational and political constraints that impair their effectiveness.

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Ekweremadu (2021) highlights capacity challenges as major limitations to the effectiveness of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies. Despite their formal powers to investigate and prosecute corrupt individuals, persistent corruption continues unabated due to legal loopholes, poor funding, inadequate personnel and the pervasive politicisation of anti-corruption efforts, which undermines the legitimacy of these institutions. In a similar vein, Azeez and Ajibowu-Yekini (2018) affirm the significance of anti-corruption agencies in combating graft, noting that while the EFCC and the Code of Conduct Bureau have made meaningful impacts, the ICPC has been less effective due to operational sluggishness. Their study, grounded in survey research, supports the notion that institutional performance varies, but the overall role of these bodies remains essential.

Ewaet *al.* (2019) further problematise the effectiveness of anti-graft agencies, citing widespread deficiencies such as lack of commitment to ethical standards, rule of law, transparency and accountability. These internal governance issues have eroded public trust and limited the agencies' ability to effect systemic change. Umoru-Oki's (2019) comparative study of Nigeria and Uganda underscores the defective nature of anti-corruption frameworks in both countries. His findings, based on World Governance Indicators, point to the inadequacy of policy measures, which are often fraught with inconsistencies and lack real impact in curbing corruption. Abu (2022) and Nwosu (2023) both emphasize the disconnection between legal frameworks and practical implementation. While Nigeria has enacted numerous anti-corruption laws, enforcement remains weak due to political interference, inadequate resources and inefficiencies in the justice system. These gaps make the legal regime more symbolic than effective.

Nnado and Ugwu (2015) shed light on external societal and internal organisational factors that hinder the EFCC's performance, including lack of public cooperation, poor staff capacity and systemic disorder. These findings align with those of Awopeju (2022), who observed that despite playing advisory roles and participating in policy implementation, the overall impact of anti-corruption agencies on governance remains limited due to weak institutional relevance in shaping policy outcomes. In the context of specific sectors, Olujobi (2023) reveals that in Nigeria's upstream petroleum industry, anti-corruption statutes are largely ineffective. The study attributes this to feeble enforcement, lack of political will and non-implementation of regulations, further affirming the systemic challenges confronting the anti-graft fight.

From a broader developmental perspective, Abomaye-Nimenibo (2022) argues that corruption negatively affects economic development by promoting bad governance, poor infrastructure, moral decay and leadership failure, which collectively stunt national growth. The Jigawa State Ministry of Justice (2023) adds a legal dimension, asserting that corruption undermines public trust in the justice system, contributes to insecurity, discourages investment and delays judicial processes. This erosion of justice has grave implications for societal stability and economic progress, thereby further hindering national development.

In summary, key challenges identified include, legal and constitutional loopholes, insufficient funding and personnel, politicisation of anti-corruption efforts, weak judicial system and enforcement mechanisms, public apathy and lack of societal cooperation, poor governance within anti-corruption institutions, absence of political will and sector-specific regulatory failures. The persistent weaknesses in Nigeria's anti-corruption framework significantly impair national development. Corruption compromises economic growth, political stability, social equity and institutional integrity. Until structural reforms are implemented to enhance the independence, capacity and credibility of anti-corruption agencies, their contribution to national development will remain marginal.

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Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Susan Rose-Ackerman's Political Economy Theory of Corruption, which offers a structural and institutional explanation of corrupt practices. Developed in 1978, the theory contends that corruption thrives in systems where public officials wield significant discretionary power and monopolistic control over state resources without corresponding mechanisms of accountability. In such environments, institutional design, rather than individual morality is central to understanding why public officials often prioritise self-interest over the public good. Corruption, according to this theory, emerges not as a personal moral failing but as a predictable outcome of flawed institutional arrangements and incentive structures that reward rent-seeking behavior and allow impunity.

This theoretical lens is particularly relevant to Nigeria's context, where anti-graft institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) often operate under the shadow of political interference. Despite their formal mandates to investigate and prosecute corrupt acts, these agencies face operational constraints stemming from selective enforcement, lack of prosecutorial independence and manipulation by political elites. Their broad discretionary powers are frequently exercised in opaque ways, undermined further by weak oversight mechanisms and ineffective internal controls. These structural weaknesses, rather than isolated missteps, reflect a broader power dynamic where political elites strategically weaken anti-corruption frameworks to serve their interests.

Within this framework, the persistence of corruption in Nigeria is not incidental but symptomatic of a governance structure that discourages transparency and accountability. Public resources meant for critical sectors such as healthcare, education, infrastructure and economic development are routinely diverted, eroding public trust, deterring investment and weakening the legitimacy of state institutions. This institutional decay ultimately constrains national development and entrenches inequality and inefficiency in the governance system.

While the Political Economy Theory provides a powerful analytical tool, it is not without limitations. Its reliance on rational choice assumptions may oversimplify the complex motivations behind corrupt behavior, particularly in culturally diverse and socially stratified contexts like Nigeria. By focusing primarily on formal institutions and incentive structures, the theory may neglect informal networks, patronage systems and socio-cultural norms that perpetuate corruption. Moreover, it does not fully address underlying structural issues such as poverty, unemployment and systemic inequality, which can drive individuals to engage in corrupt acts as a survival strategy.

Despite these critiques, the theory remains a robust and pragmatic framework for understanding the institutional dynamics that impede the effectiveness of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies. It emphasises the need for comprehensive reforms that promote accountability, reduce political interference and strengthen institutional autonomy. More importantly, it underscores the necessity of redesigning incentive systems to reward ethical conduct and impose real penalties for wrongdoing. By shifting the focus from individual culpability to systemic dysfunction, the theory enables a more grounded and strategic approach to combating corruption and fostering sustainable national development.

In essence, Rose-Ackerman's Political Economy Theory of Corruption enhances this study by illuminating the deep-rooted institutional challenges that anti-graft agencies in Nigeria face. It provides a compelling framework for linking anti-corruption efforts with broader national development objectives and for recommending reforms that are both structurally sound and contextually relevant.

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IV. Materials and Methods

This study utilised secondary data to examine the challenges confronting anti-graft agencies in Nigeria and the implications of these challenges for national development. The choice of secondary data is justified by the availability of extensive literature, official government documents and institutional reports that provide detailed insights into the structure, operations and limitations of Nigeria’s anti-corruption bodies.

Data for the study were sourced from a broad spectrum of credible materials, including peer-reviewed academic journals, textbooks, legal statutes and policy documents. Additional sources comprised reports from anti-graft institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), alongside publications by international organisations such as the World Bank, Transparency International and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. These materials were supplemented by academic theses, media reports and critical analyses that offer nuanced perspectives on the performance, independence and institutional capacity of Nigeria’s anti-corruption agencies.

The study applied thematic content analysis to identify, interpret and organise recurring patterns and ideas relevant to the research focus. Although the research does not incorporate primary data collection through field surveys or interviews, the breadth and depth of the secondary sources used ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. To mitigate potential limitations, such as reporting bias or inconsistencies, the study triangulated information across multiple authoritative sources, thereby strengthening the validity of the conclusions drawn. The methodological approach adopted in this study thus provides a solid foundation for exploring the institutional dynamics of anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria and their broader implications for governance and development.

V. Results

**TABLE I
A Snapshot of High-Profile Corruption Allegations and Prosecutions in Nigeria**

S/n	Individuals Involved	Period	Offences	Amount Involved	Action of Antigraft Institutions and how the matter was resolved
1.	Godwin Emezie	2014-2023	Alleged abuse of office, forex fraud, procurement fraud, illegal cash withdrawals	Over N1.2 billion (ongoing investigations into larger sums)	Arrested by DSS, later charged by EFCC; granted bail, case ongoing
2.	Diezani Alison-Madueke	2010-2015	Money laundering, embezzlement, awarding dubious contracts	Over \$115 million + N23.3 billion	EFCC seized properties worth billions; extradition from UK still pending
3.	Abba Kyari	2021	Alleged involvement in internet fraud with Hushpuppi	\$1.1 million	Suspended by police, arrested by NDLEA on separate drug charges, case ongoing
4.	Abdulkadir Maina	2010-2020	Pension fund fraud	N195billion	Arrested, prosecuted, sentenced to 8 years imprisonment

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5.	Stella Oduah	2011-2014	Fraudulent contracts, money laundering	N9.4 billion	Under EFCC investigation, later arraigned in court in 2023
6.	Lamido Sanusi	2013	Whistleblowing on missing oil revenue	N20billion	Suspended as CBN Governor; no formal charges, allegations politically sensitive
7.	Farouk Lawan	2012	Collection of bribes during fuel subsidy probe	\$500,000 out of \$3 million	Prosecuted and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment
8.	Ghaji Rahila (National Boundary Commission Staff)	2020	Money laundering, fraudulent transactions		Prosecuted at Federal High Court, Abuja by ICPC
9.	David Umahi	2015	Alleged diversion of election funds	N400 million	EFCC confiscated property; case under investigation
10	Godswill Akpabio	2007-2015	Alleged diversion of state funds	N100 billion	EFCC investigations ongoing, no prosecution yet
11	Lt Gen Azubuike Ihejirika (retd.)	2016	Arms procurement scandal	\$2.1 billion	Arrested by DSS, released on bail; case still under investigation
12	Orji Uzor Kalu	1999-2007	Money Laundering	N3.2 billion	Convicted in 2019, sentenced to 12 years; conviction later overturned, retrial ongoing
13	Adebayo Alao-Akala	2007-2011	Corruption, contract fraud	N11.5 billion	Prosecuted by EFCC, case stalled before his death in 2022
14	Joshua Dariye	1999-2007 (convicted 2018)	Diversion of ecological funds	N1.126 billion	Sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, later pardoned by FG in 2022
15	Jolly Nyame	1999-2007	Misappropriation of state funds	N1.64 billion	Sentenced to 14 years imprisonment, later pardoned in 2022
16	Sambo Dasuki	2015	Arms deal scandal, diversion of military funds	\$2.1 billion	Detained without trial for years; later granted bail, prosecution ongoing
17	Bukola Saraki	2003-2011	False asset declaration, money laundering	N3.5 billion (alleged)	Trial by CCT, discharged and acquitted by Supreme Court in 2018
18	Patience Jonathan	2009-2015	Money laundering, unjust enrichment	Over \$20 million	EFCC froze accounts; legal battle ongoing over

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					fund ownership
19	NsimaEkere	2016-2019	Diversion of funds while serving as NDDC MD	N47 billion	Arrested and investigated by EFCC in 2022; case ongoing
20	Senator Basse Albert Akpan	2010-2022	Receiving vehicles as bribes while serving as Akwa Ibom Finance Commissioner	N204 million (value of vehicles)	Prosecuted by EFCC; convicted in 2022 and sentenced to 42 years imprisonment, later released on bail pending appeal
21	Udom Emmanuel	2015-2023	Alleged diversion of public funds and irregular contracts (claims by opposition groups and petitions)	Billions (not clearly quantified)	No formal charges by EFCC; petitions reportedly submitted, but no prosecution initiated as of 2025

Source: Compiled by Peter Archibong Essoh, Udom Sunday Daniel, Okoro Sunday Asangausung , (2025)

The Table 1 presents a snapshot of high-profile corruption allegations and prosecutions in Nigeria, highlighting the pervasiveness of corrupt practices among public officials across various sectors and political eras. It reflects a systemic challenge that cuts through the judiciary, security, finance, oil and government administration. While billions of naira and dollars were allegedly misappropriated, laundered, or embezzled by the listed individuals, the outcomes of the cases underscore persistent institutional weaknesses and inconsistencies in Nigeria’s anti-corruption efforts.

Some individuals, like Abdul rasheed Maina and Senator Basse Albert Akpan, faced full prosecutions and convictions, suggesting a measure of institutional resolve. However, many others either remain under investigation with no clear resolution or have had their cases stalled, overturned, or dismissed, often under controversial circumstances. The frequent granting of bail, protracted trials and in some instances, political pardons, as seen in the cases of Joshua Dariye and Jolly Nyame, indicate how the enforcement of accountability is uneven and often subject to political influence.

Moreover, despite the involvement of multiple anti-graft agencies such as the EFCC, ICPC, DSS and even foreign governments, as in the case of Diezani Alison-Madueke, outcomes have frequently failed to match the gravity of the allegations. The absence of formal charges in some cases, despite public petitions and media coverage, further exposes gaps in the legal and political will to confront corruption comprehensively.

Overall, the table reflects a troubling pattern; while Nigeria has structures in place to combat corruption, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is undermined by selective justice, procedural delays, institutional rivalry and a lack of transparency. These factors collectively weaken the credibility of anti-graft institutions and diminish public confidence in the government’s commitment to genuine accountability.

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TABLE II
Major Challenges of Anti-Graft Agencies in Nigeria

S/n	Challenges	Description	Government Effort
1.	Political interference	Despite public declarations of support for anti-corruption, political leaders often interfere with investigations, especially when allies are involved. Selective prosecution and a lack of autonomy for anti-graft agencies erode public trust.	Government claims to have given EFCC and ICPC independence, but enforcement remains selective. Calls for legal safeguards for agency autonomy persist.
2.	Weak judicial system	Delays in trials, frequent adjournments and legal technicalities allow suspects to evade justice. High-profile cases sometimes take years without resolution, weakening the deterrent effect.	Establishment of special anti-corruption courts in some states; training of judges on financial crimes. Reforms still slow.
3.	Institutional limitations	Many agencies lack modern investigative tools, forensic capacity and data-sharing frameworks, which hampers effective tracking and prosecution of corrupt acts.	Some support through international partnerships (e.g., UNODC, EU) and periodic training programmes. Budget constraints limit scalability.
4.	Corruption within law enforcement	Some officials in police, customs and even anti-graft agencies themselves engage in corrupt practices, undermining the fight against corruption.	Periodic staff vetting, public complaints mechanisms and code of conduct enforcement—though not consistently applied.
5.	Inter-agency rivalry	Lack of coordination and unhealthy competition between EFCC, ICPC, DSS, Police and other agencies often leads to duplication, sabotage, or abandonment of cases.	Efforts to enhance collaboration through the Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT); however, turf wars still persist.
6.	Lack of public support	Apathy, fear of retaliation and lack of whistle-blower protection discourage citizens from reporting corruption.	Whistle-blower Protection Policy launched in 2016; however, enforcement and protection remain weak
7.	Insufficient funds	Budgetary constraints limit operations, investigations and prosecutions. Agencies often lack resources for technology, training and logistics.	Government allocates funds yearly, but releases are often delayed or insufficient. External donor support occasionally supplements funding.
8.	Lack of political will	Inconsistent commitment by leadership to genuinely pursue anti-corruption, especially when it implicates elites or political allies.	Anti-corruption rhetoric common in campaigns, but enforcement against top officials remains weak. Some reforms under pressure from civil society and foreign partners.
9.	Absence of stringent implementation	Lenient sentencing, plea bargains and presidential pardons dilute the consequences of corruption.	Some review of sentencing practices under judiciary reforms, but executive interference (e.g.,

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	of anti-corruption punitive measures		presidential pardons) undermines consistency.
10.	Inadequate legal framework	Outdated or vague laws make prosecution difficult, especially with the evolution of cyber and financial crimes.	Some updates through laws like the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2022, but further legislative updates needed.
11.	Poor record-keeping and data management	Lack of centralized data systems hinders tracking of financial flows and repeat offenders.	Government introduced Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) and BVN; digital case systems remain limited in reach.
12.	Security threats to investigators and witnesses	Anti-graft personnel and whistle-blowers are often threatened or harmed, creating fear and compromising investigations.	Whistle-blower protection framework exists, but not legally entrenched; no robust witness protection agency currently functional.

Source: Compiled by Peter Archibong Essoh, Udom Sunday Daniel, Okoro Sunday Asangausung , (2025)

The table provides a detailed overview of the major structural and operational challenges confronting anti-graft agencies in Nigeria, revealing how these barriers collectively hinder the country's fight against corruption. It highlights the deeply embedded issues that compromise the efficiency, integrity and impact of institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).

One of the most pressing concerns is political interference, where government officials, particularly those in power or with strong political connections, influence the direction and outcomes of investigations. This not only fosters selective prosecution but also severely undermines public confidence in the independence and credibility of anti-corruption institutions. Although the government proclaims autonomy for these agencies, the lack of enforceable legal frameworks means such independence remains largely theoretical.

Judicial inefficiencies compound the problem. The courts are often plagued by delays, frequent adjournments and legal technicalities, which allow many high-profile suspects to either stall or entirely evade justice. While some efforts have been made to establish anti-corruption courts and train judges in handling financial crimes, progress remains slow and inconsistent.

Operationally, many anti-graft agencies face institutional weaknesses, including outdated investigative tools, insufficient forensic capabilities and limited data-sharing mechanisms. These limitations are further exacerbated by inadequate funding and logistical support, often leaving agencies reliant on foreign donors for technical and financial aid. Corruption within law enforcement bodies themselves, including among those tasked with fighting corruption, adds another layer of complexity, making internal accountability both necessary and elusive.

Moreover, the lack of synergy between various security and enforcement agencies, such as EFCC, ICPC, DSS and the Police leads to inter-agency rivalry. This often results in duplicated efforts, stalled cases, or

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even active sabotage of each other’s work, despite attempts to foster coordination through platforms like the Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT).

Public apathy and fear further hamper efforts, as citizens are discouraged from reporting corrupt practices due to weak whistle-blower protections and occasional threats to their safety. Although policies have been introduced to encourage whistle-blowing, their practical enforcement and legal backing remain inadequate. Similarly, threats to investigators and a weak or non-existent witness protection system compromise case integrity and deter honest actors.

The legal framework underpinning anti-corruption is also outdated in several respects. While new laws like the Proceeds of Crime Act (2022) have been enacted, the legal system still lags behind the evolving dynamics of cyber and financial crimes, making prosecution difficult.

Finally, lenient sentencing, the use of plea bargains and controversial presidential pardons signal a lack of genuine political will to enforce anti-corruption measures with the required seriousness. Even when officials are prosecuted, the punishment is often minimal or circumvented, reducing the deterrent effect and perpetuating a culture of impunity.

Altogether, the table underscores that without deep institutional reforms, legal modernisation and the political will to act consistently against corruption, Nigeria’s anti-graft efforts will continue to fall short, regardless of rhetoric or isolated actions.

TABLE III
Implications of the challenges of anti-graft agencies for National Development in Nigeria

S/n	Implications	Resultant Effect
1.	Increasing cost of governance	Corruption leads to inflated contracts, ghost workers and misuse of public funds, significantly increasing the cost of running government operations. Resources meant for development are diverted to sustain wasteful and corrupt bureaucracies.
2.	Weakening investors’ confidence	Foreign and domestic investors are discouraged by opaque regulatory environments, lack of accountability and fear of bribery or extortion, leading to capital flight and stunted economic growth.
3.	Weak Service Delivery	Public services like education, health, water and electricity suffer due to diversion of funds, lack of accountability and mismanagement in implementation. This limits human capital development and quality of life.
4.	Culture of Impunity	When anti-graft efforts fail, corrupt officials operate without fear of punishment. This emboldens further misconduct across all levels of government and discourages ethical public service.
5.	Erosion of Public Trust in Institutions	The failure to hold corrupt elites accountable undermines citizens’ faith in the judiciary, law enforcement and political institutions, weakening democratic participation and social cohesion.
6.	Increased Poverty and Inequality	Funds embezzled by elites reduce the amount available for poverty reduction, job creation and social programs. This widens the gap between the rich and poor and deepens social unrest.
7.	Political Instability and Insecurity	Corruption in the security sector, electoral manipulation and exclusion from public resources fuel grievances, violence and

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		insurgency, undermining national peace and unity.
8.	Undermining of the Rule of Law	Corruption compromises justice systems, where laws are applied selectively or not at all, allowing powerful individuals to act above the law and weakening legal institutions.
9.	Institutional Decay	Public institutions become ineffective when promotions, procurement and decisions are based on bribery rather than merit, professionalism, or national interest.
10.	Failure to Achieve Developmental Goals	Corruption diverts resources meant for infrastructure, health, education and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making national and international development targets unattainable.

Source: Compiled by Peter Archibong Essoh, Udom Sunday Daniel, Okoro Sunday Asangausung , (2025)

The Table III presents a detailed analysis of how the challenges facing anti-graft agencies in Nigeria have far-reaching negative implications for national development. It shows that the inefficiency of these agencies contributes to a rise in the cost of governance, as corruption fuels waste and mismanagement. Investor confidence is eroded due to an unpredictable and corrupt business environment, limiting economic growth. The diversion of public funds weakens essential service delivery, particularly in health, education, and infrastructure, stalling human development.

A persistent culture of impunity and the failure to prosecute corrupt officials foster unethical governance, while public trust in institutions declines as justice systems appear compromised and selective. This erosion of trust undermines democratic engagement and social cohesion. Moreover, widespread corruption deepens poverty and inequality, as public resources are siphoned away from social welfare programs. It also fuels political instability and insecurity, especially when corruption affects the security and electoral sectors. The rule of law is weakened as corrupt elites operate above legal constraints, and institutional integrity declines when decisions are based on patronage rather than merit. Ultimately, these effects coalesce to derail the achievement of national and global development goals, rendering anti-corruption efforts not just a legal or ethical necessity, but a fundamental requirement for Nigeria's socio-economic transformation.

V. Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study paint a compelling picture of the depth, complexity and consequences of corruption in Nigeria, particularly through the lens of high-profile corruption cases and the structural weaknesses of anti-graft institutions. Table I reveals the extensive scope and scale of corruption, involving top-level government officials across multiple sectors; finance, oil, defence, legislature and public administration—over several administrations. Despite the staggering sums involved, ranging from hundreds of millions to billions of naira and dollars, there is a notable disparity in outcomes, with only a few individuals being convicted and punished decisively, while many others have evaded justice through legal loopholes, stalled investigations, or outright political interference.

This pattern highlights the unevenness of Nigeria's anti-corruption enforcement and exposes the systemic flaws within the judicial and prosecutorial processes. The granting of bail, delayed trials, presidential pardons and the lack of progress in high-profile cases point to a compromised justice system where the rule of law is inconsistently applied. For instance, while cases like those of Abdurashied Maina and Senator Bassey Albert Akpan resulted in convictions, others such as Diezani Alison-Madueke and Godwin

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Emefiele remain unresolved despite extensive media coverage and public interest, undermining the credibility of anti-graft efforts.

Further deepening the challenge is the institutional analysis provided in Table II, which identifies and elaborates on the internal and external constraints facing agencies like the EFCC and ICPC. Political interference emerges as a particularly formidable obstacle, often shielding politically connected individuals from investigation or prosecution. The weak judicial system, marked by procedural delays and legal technicalities, further dilutes accountability. Compounding these issues are operational deficiencies such as limited funding, outdated investigative infrastructure and inter-agency rivalry, all of which hinder coordinated and effective responses to corruption.

The analysis also reveals that corruption within the law enforcement and judicial sectors, along with the absence of a robust whistle-blower and witness protection framework, creates an environment of fear and impunity. This not only obstructs investigations but also disincentivizes public participation in anti-corruption efforts. Furthermore, the inconsistent application of punitive measures, lenient sentencing and politicised pardons reinforce a perception that corruption is a low-risk, high-reward endeavour for the elite.

The implications of these challenges, as outlined in Table III, are deeply concerning for Nigeria's socio-economic and political development. The mismanagement and diversion of public resources inflate the cost of governance and erode service delivery in critical sectors like education, healthcare and infrastructure. This contributes to persistent poverty, inequality and weakened human capital. Moreover, the entrenched culture of impunity undermines public trust in government institutions and the democratic process, discouraging civic engagement and fueling disillusionment.

Investor confidence is also negatively impacted, as the business environment is perceived as unpredictable and fraught with bureaucratic and regulatory corruption. This not only deters foreign direct investment but also stifles local enterprise development. The erosion of institutional integrity and rule of law fosters a climate of lawlessness and political instability, which can manifest in increased insecurity, violence and civil unrest.

Ultimately, the findings underscore that corruption, enabled by weak anti-graft mechanisms, poses a significant threat to Nigeria's national development and democratic sustainability. The persistence of these issues suggests that without a fundamental overhaul of institutional frameworks—ensuring autonomy, transparency, accountability and legal reform—anti-corruption initiatives will continue to be ineffective. The fight against corruption, therefore, must move beyond rhetoric and symbolic prosecutions to embrace systemic reforms backed by strong political will, legal modernisation and active citizen engagement.

The findings of this study reflect and are strongly supported by existing scholarly literature, revealing the entrenched and systemic nature of corruption in Nigeria and the critical weaknesses in the nation's anti-graft mechanisms. As shown in the discussion, corruption cuts across different sectors and levels of government, involving staggering sums of public funds with limited accountability. This aligns with the observations of Ekweremadu (2021), who emphasises that despite the existence of anti-corruption bodies, persistent corruption thrives due to operational inefficiencies, legal loopholes and insufficient capacity, all of which contribute to the weak enforcement of anti-graft measures.

The disparity in outcomes for high-profile cases, where only a few individuals are held accountable while others escape justice through legal and political machinations, underscores the lack of consistency in Nigeria's judicial process. This phenomenon is mirrored in the works of Azeez and Ajibowu-Yekini (2018) and Abu (2022), who note that legal frameworks, though extensive, often serve a symbolic function

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rather than a substantive one due to poor implementation, political interference and procedural delays. These insights support the observation that anti-corruption initiatives often falter when confronted with influential individuals or political interests, reinforcing the public perception of a compromised justice system.

The operational and institutional challenges confronting agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC, as identified in this study, further reinforce existing research. Scholars like Ewaet *al.* (2019) and Umoru-Oki (2019) have emphasised the lack of internal governance standards, inadequate accountability and transparency as critical factors undermining the effectiveness of anti-graft institutions. The challenges of poor funding, limited manpower, inter-agency rivalry and obsolete investigative tools also mirror these academic critiques, suggesting a systemic inertia that prevents these bodies from executing their mandates effectively.

Moreover, the politicisation of anti-corruption efforts; a recurring theme in the findings is a major concern raised in both empirical and comparative studies. As observed by Nnado and Ugwu (2015), external societal pressures and internal weaknesses compound the problem, especially when public cooperation is minimal and public trust in anti-corruption agencies is low. This environment of distrust and impunity discourages civic engagement and makes whistle-blowing or witness testimony risky, thus stalling investigative and prosecutorial progress.

The broader socio-economic consequences of unchecked corruption, as outlined in the findings, are consistent with the developmental perspectives in the literature. Abomaye-Nimenibo (2022) argues that corruption fosters leadership failure and bad governance, which in turn impede national development. These effects are visible in deteriorating public services, weak infrastructure and a diminished quality of life, particularly in critical sectors such as education and healthcare. Similarly, the Jigawa State Ministry of Justice (2023) highlights how the erosion of justice and rule of law deters investment and deepens insecurity—issues that are clearly articulated in the discussion section, which links corruption with investor apathy and political instability.

In essence, the findings of this study are not isolated but rather embedded within a broader scholarly consensus that views corruption in Nigeria as both a symptom and a cause of systemic governance failure. Without significant reforms aimed at enhancing institutional autonomy, legal accountability and political neutrality, anti-corruption efforts will continue to be undermined. The literature supports the view that meaningful progress requires more than policy articulation; it demands structural transformation, consistent enforcement and genuine political will—factors that are critical to ensuring sustainable national development.

VI. Conclusion

This paper examined the challenges confronting anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria and the implications of these challenges for national development. The results revealed that anti-graft institutions in Nigeria are hampered by numerous structural and operational challenges. These include political interference, inadequate funding, obsolete investigative infrastructure, judicial inefficiencies and inter-agency rivalry. These constraints significantly weaken the agencies' ability to investigate and prosecute high-profile corruption cases effectively, thereby fostering a culture of impunity and eroding public confidence in the justice system. Further results showed that the inefficiency of anti-graft institutions directly contributes to the diversion of public resources, poor service delivery and weakened governance. This, in turn, perpetuates poverty, inequality and underdevelopment, particularly in critical sectors such as education, healthcare and infrastructure. Moreover, the prevalence of corruption damages investor confidence and

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undermines democratic institutions, ultimately threatening Nigeria's socio-economic stability and national development.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing an understanding of the entrenched structural and institutional barriers that hinder the effectiveness of Nigeria's anti-graft agencies. By linking these challenges to broader governance and development outcomes, the research underscores the complex interplay between weak anti-corruption enforcement and the persistence of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. It expands the discourse beyond mere institutional critique to highlight how political interference, operational inefficiencies and judicial shortcomings collectively sustain a climate of impunity and systemic failure. The study also sheds light on the socio-economic consequences of corruption, offering empirical insight into how compromised accountability mechanisms erode public trust, discourage investment and destabilise democratic governance.

Given the scope and implications of these findings, further research is recommended to explore comparative anti-corruption models in other developing democracies, with a focus on legal and institutional reforms that have yielded measurable outcomes. Future studies could also examine the role of civil society, media and technology in promoting transparency and accountability, as well as strategies for strengthening public engagement in the fight against corruption. Such inquiries will be critical to informing policy interventions and institutional reforms aimed at revitalising Nigeria's anti-graft efforts and advancing sustainable national development.

VII. Recommendations

Based on the findings, this paper recommends, first, a comprehensive institutional reform that guarantees the autonomy of anti-graft agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC. This should include legal safeguards against political interference, improved budgetary allocations and investment in modern investigative tools and training to enhance operational capacity. Strengthening the independence and capabilities of these institutions is essential to ensure that investigations and prosecutions are impartial, timely and effective.

Second, there is a critical need to overhaul the judicial process to reduce procedural delays and ensure swift adjudication of corruption cases. This includes establishing special anti-corruption courts, enforcing strict timelines for case resolution and enhancing the integrity and accountability of judicial officers. These steps will help restore public confidence in the justice system and reinforce the rule of law as a cornerstone of Nigeria's anti-corruption and development agenda.

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