

**DEMOCRACY, DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF FIGHTING
CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA, 1999-2024**

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Abstract

This research examines democracy, Digital Governance, and the Challenges of Combating Corruption in Nigeria from 1999 to 2024. The topic is timely, cutting-edge, and relevant for investigation at this time, as Nigeria's return to democracy after years of military rule in 1999 has seen various democratic regimes instrumental in Nigeria's fight against corruption. However, despite some progress, challenges persist. Nevertheless some key steps initiated by different democratic regimes over time to fight corruption in Nigeria included: the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) 2003, the launch of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), 2004; the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act, 2016; the launch of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in the country in 2016; and the establishment of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC), 2019 etc. Also, some digital governance initiatives enunciated by different democratic regimes to curb corruption in the country since 1999 are: the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIIS); Bank Verification Number (BVN); the Treasury Single Account (TSA); the Open Treasury Portal; the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC); the E-Procurement Platforms, and others. With all the above developments, the government has faced key challenges in the fight against corruption, including weak institutions, the digital divide,

resistance to change, cybersecurity threats, and sustaining progress. This study is grounded in a multidimensional approach to historical reconstruction. The method of data collection is a secondary data-gathering method that will enrich the study's content. Findings and recommendations from the study will assist policymakers in the country in formulating better policies that enhance accountability in the Nigerian nation-state, thereby effectively minimising corruption.

Keywords: *Democracy, Digital Governance, Corruption, Accountability, Transparency*

Introduction

May 29th, 1999, heralded a watershed in Nigeria's political history. It marked the dawn of the Fourth Republic, which followed numerous years of military rule and was characterised by pockets of challenges, including infrastructure decay, institutionalised corruption, human rights violations, suffering, and others. The commoner's hope for a just and egalitarian society was rekindled with the return to democratic governance in 1999, with the belief that Nigerians would enjoy enormous social welfare, justice, equity, and equal access to resources and power, as well as accountability from government.

Nevertheless, according to Adeyemi and Ayo, “the interplay between democracy, digital governance, and corruption presents a complex landscape in Nigeria's history between 1999 and 2024. Since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has pursued democratic governance amid persistent corruption that undermines political institutions and economic development. The introduction of digital governance initiatives has been positioned as a potential solution to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.”¹ Despite government efforts, the challenges of fighting corruption remain formidable. Corruption in Nigeria is deeply entrenched,

¹ A. Adeyemi & C.K. Ayo. Digital Governance and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration*, 28(1), 2020, p. 1-20.

exacerbated by weak institutional frameworks and a lack of political will. Digital tools, which are quite promising for fighting corruption, have not consistently delivered the expected outcomes. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and a lack of comprehensive policies have hindered the effectiveness of digital governance in combating corruption in Nigeria since the return to democracy.

Furthermore, the socio-political context, characterised by a patronage system and widespread impunity, has complicated the fight against corruption since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. The effectiveness of digital governance strategies is often compromised by these entrenched practices, raising questions about their viability in the Nigerian context². This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how digital governance can be harnessed to strengthen democratic processes and address corruption in Nigeria, while acknowledging the significant challenges that lie ahead.

Understanding the Nature of Corruption in Nigeria

Succinctly, Odey et al had maintained that, “the attainment of ersatz independence failed to resolve Africa's challenges (Nigeria). There have been frantic efforts at nation-building in post-independent Nigeria, but corruption has posed a major challenge to this effort.³ This is because, since independence, successive governments have devised ways of addressing the myriad post-independence challenges, such as poor leadership, the nationality question, bribery

² E.C Ezeani., & O. Eze. The Role of Digital Technologies in Combating Corruption in Nigeria: Opportunities and Challenges. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 15(2), 2022, p 45-63.

³ O.P. Odey, T.O. Ellah & C.B. Utulu. Corruption and Nation Building in Nigeria Since 2015. *Humanus Discourse* Vol. 3. NO 1. 2023, p. 1-15. ISSN 2787-0308 (Online).

and corruption, boundary conflicts, poverty, environmental degradation, gender issues, unemployment, and insecurity.⁴

Also, Onigu Otite contends that corruption means the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity. He further explains that corruption involves the injection of additional, improper transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events and altering judgments and positions of trust. It consists of the doers', givers', and receivers' use of informal, extra-legal, or illegal acts to facilitate matters.⁵ In a 2006 study, Transparency International described the hydra-headed nature of corruption thus: “ it affects all sectors of society from construction (France), education (Uganda), police (Malaysia), to parliament (Japan), judiciary (Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Israel, and Nepal), and even the church (Greece).”⁶ Commenting on the effects of corruption, Dreher et al. report that "corruption is the most significant contributor to low income and growth in many of the poor countries."⁷

Nevertheless, understanding the nature of corruption in Nigeria involves examining its historical context, systemic factors, and societal impacts. Corruption in Nigeria is deeply rooted in its political, economic, and social systems, influenced by colonial legacies, weak institutions, and pervasive impunity.

Types of Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption in Nigeria manifests in several ways, including:

⁴ O.P. Odey, T.O. Ellah & C.B. Utulu. *Corruption and Nation Building...* p. 1-15.

⁵ O. Otite. “On the Sociological Study of Corruption.” In *Nigeria: Corruption in Development* edited by F. Odekunle. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1986, p.12.

⁶ Otite. O. “On the Sociological...” p. 19.

⁷ Dreher, A. et al “Corruption around the World: Evidence from a Structural Model.” *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 35 (3), 2007, p. 443.

1. Bribery: Offering or accepting gifts or favours in exchange for services or advantages.
2. Embezzlement: Misappropriation of public funds by government officials.
3. Fraud: Scams and deceitful practices that exploit individuals or the state.
4. Nepotism and Cronyism: Favouring relatives or friends for jobs and contracts, undermining meritocracy.

Historical Context of Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption in Nigeria can be traced back to colonial rule, where governance structures prioritised exploitation over development. In the post-independence era, the political landscape was characterised by instability, military coups, and the emergence of a patronage system in which political leaders exchanged favours for loyalty and support. Corruption in Nigeria has deep historical roots, and its evolution can be traced back to the era of colonial rule. Here's a concise overview of how colonial policies laid the groundwork for systemic corruption:

The Nature of Corruption in the Era of Colonial Administration in Nigeria, 1861-1960

Indirect Rule 1900-1946

Introduced by Lord Fredrick Lugard, the system relied on local rulers (Chiefs, Obas, Shehus, Ezes, Emirs, etc.) to administer regions, enclaves, chiefdoms, emirates, etc., which often led to the manipulation of power and resources. This created an environment in which local

leaders were incentivised to extract wealth for personal gain, fostering early forms of corruption.⁸.

1. **Resource Exploitation:** The British colonial administration focused on extracting resources (e.g., palm oil, cocoa, tin, gold, groundnut, etc.). This led to the establishment of monopolistic practices and exploitation of local economies, promoting a culture of bribery and kickbacks as local traders sought to navigate colonial bureaucracy without many challenges.
2. **Corruption in Tax Collection:** The colonial government imposed taxes (like the hut tax in the late 19th century) that often resulted in corruption at the local level. Local tax collectors, under pressure to meet quotas, resorted to extortion and bribery to supplement their incomes.
3. **Political Corruption:** The political landscape was characterised by favouritism, nepotism, ethnicity, and patronage, with British officials often favouring certain ethnic groups over others. This created divisions and a culture of loyalty driven by personal gains rather than national interest.⁹.

Post-Colonial Nature of Corruption in Nigeria

In the Transition to Independence, **1954-1960**, as Nigeria approached independence, the political class inherited the corrupt practices established during the colonial era. The early post-independence leaders, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello, and Obafemi

⁸ F. J. Lugard. *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 1922.

⁹ O. Akinwumi, (ed) "The Economics of Colonial Nigeria: The Impact of the British on the Nigerian Economy in *Inter-group Relations in Nigeria during the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Aboki Publishers, 2006.

Awolowo, faced significant challenges in curbing corruption that was deeply entrenched in the political system. During the First Republic (1963-1966), political instability and corruption escalated to a monumental level, leading to a coup in 1966. The culture of corruption became more pronounced as politicians prioritised personal gains over national development and nation-building¹⁰.

Nevertheless, the legacy of colonial rule laid the foundation for corruption that has persisted throughout Nigeria's history. The combination of indirect governance, resource exploitation, and administrative inefficiencies established patterns of corruption that were hard to dismantle after independence¹¹. This historical context is essential for understanding the current state of corruption in Nigeria.

Major Impacts of Corruption on Nigeria

Weak Institutions

Institutions such as the judiciary, police, and anti-corruption agencies often lack the independence and capacity to enforce laws effectively. This has fostered a culture of impunity where corrupt officials operate without fear of accountability. At some point, the institutions do not have the required resources to aid their mandate as stipulated by the law. As a result of lean budget allocation, such an organisation tends not to operate effectively. Today in Nigeria, due to weak institutions, citizens engage in electoral malpractices with a brazen face and tell those who have rigged out to "go to Court", a slogan that has become a popular saying among citizens and

¹⁰ G. R. Olsen. "Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Overview." *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 7(3), 2013, p. 123-135.

¹¹ O. Nnoli. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 1980.

politicians. Also, those who rig such elections have the means to reach out to judicial officers, thereby buying them off with hard currency, so that, in the course of investigating such petitions, they tactically give judgements to legalise the anomalies perpetrated during the elections. The police, as stakeholders in the elections, are so biased that during such elections, they work in conjunction with government officials and political parties to rig the elections by either providing security for ballot box stuffing or aiding the thumb-printing of ballot papers in support of a particular candidate or political party. The anti-corruption institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), and Department of State Security (DSS) are so weak and compromised that, whenever a matter is presented or reported to them, those who come to reported cases are billed a sumptuous amount of cash to be paid before such crimes could be investigated.

Oil Dependency

Nigeria's economy heavily relies on oil exports, which has created a lucrative environment for corruption. The oil sector has been plagued by mismanagement and illicit practices, with significant revenues often diverted from public use. Oil dependency in Nigeria has indeed been linked to various forms of corruption and governance issues. The country's heavy reliance on oil revenues has created a system where a significant portion of national income comes from a single commodity. This concentration has led to several challenges, such as the resource curse, corruption in revenue distribution, lack of diversification, conflicts and instability, environmental devastation, and weak institutions.

Political Patronage

The practice of distributing state resources to loyal supporters is common, undermining democratic processes and encouraging corruption at all levels of government in Nigeria. Political patronage refers to the practice where political leaders provide jobs, contracts, or other benefits to their supporters in exchange for political loyalty and votes. In Nigeria, political patronage is deeply entrenched, with several implications. It has contributed to inequality, corruption, and clientelism.

The Evolution of Digital Governance in Nigeria

Prelude to the Early Initiatives, 1990s-2000s

Introduction of Information Communication Technology Policies: The Nigerian government began recognising the importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for governance in the late 1990s. The National Policy for Information Technology (NPIT) was formulated in 2001¹². National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA): Established in 2001, NITDA was tasked with implementing the national IT policy and promoting the development of IT in Nigeria¹³.

The Electronic Government Strategy, 2005-2010

National e-Government Strategy: Launched in 2006, this strategy aimed to leverage ICT for better service delivery, transparency, and accountability in governance. It focused on establishing a framework for e-government initiatives.

¹² The Federal Government of Nigeria: Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, 2019.

¹³ National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), 2020.

Pilot Projects: Several pilot projects were initiated, including the Integrated Tax Administration System and the Nigerian Customs Service's e-Customs initiative.

Expansion and Integration, 2010-2015

Digital Infrastructure Development: Investments in broadband infrastructure began, aimed at enhancing connectivity nationwide. The National Broadband Plan (2013-2018) was introduced to improve access to internet services.

Mobile Governance Initiatives: With increasing mobile phone penetration, mobile platforms were utilised for service delivery, including health and education services.

Policy Frameworks and Regulatory Bodies, 2015-2020

National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS): Launched in 2020, this policy aims to promote a digital economy that enhances governance quality, economic growth, and citizen participation.

Digital Identity Initiatives: The National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) has been instrumental in implementing a digital identity system to streamline public service delivery.

Recent Developments, 2020-2024

E-Government Master plan: In 2021, the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy unveiled the National E-Government Master plan, which focuses on improving public-sector efficiency through digital tools. Data Protection and Cybersecurity: The Nigerian Data

Protection Regulation (NDPR), enacted in 2019, aims to ensure citizens' data privacy in the digital space.

Major Efforts in Combating Corruption in Nigeria with Digital Devices over Time

In recent years, major efforts to combat corruption in Nigeria have been intensified by the federal government, notably through the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2004, the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) in 2003,¹⁴ the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act, 2016; the launch of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2016; and the establishment of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC), 2019 etc. in addition are some digital governance initiatives created by different democratic regimes to curb corruption in the country since 1999, they are: Government Integrated Financial Management System, (GIFMIS)- to improve financial transparency, the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS); the Treasury Single Account (TSA); the Open Treasury Portal; Bank Verification Number, (BVN), the E-Procurement Platforms, National Identity management Commission, (NIMC), the implementation of the Whistleblower Policy in 2016 and others. Besides, the challenges of fighting corruption persist, including political interference and limited resources allocated to institutions tasked with combating corruption.

Key Challenges Associated with Digital Governance in Nigeria

¹⁴ Odey, O.P, Ellah, T.O., & Utulu, C.B. Corruption and Nation Building in Nigeria... p 1.

1. Infrastructure Deficiencies: Despite progress, inadequate infrastructure remains a significant barrier to effective digital governance.
2. Digital Divide: Disparities in access to technology across urban and rural areas hinder inclusive governance.
3. Cybersecurity Concerns: Increasing cyber threats pose challenges to the integrity of digital governance systems.
4. Digital literacy and skill development.
5. Interagency collaborations.

Conclusion

This study explored the interplay between democracy, digital governance, and the challenges of combating corruption in Nigeria from 1999 to 2024. Findings indicate that the outcomes of digital transformation efforts are evident in their mechanisms and the effective delivery of services. This transformation is reflected in the rise of various platforms and initiatives introduced by the government, which have reshaped governance mechanisms by integrating digital technology into the Nigerian nation-state. Also, the study demonstrates that since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, the country has made significant strides in integrating digital technologies into governance, particularly in efforts to combat corruption. The establishment of various digital initiatives, such as the e-Government strategy and the implementation of the National Identity Management System, aimed to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. These efforts have been supported by policies such as the National Digital Economic Policy and the Nigerian Data Protection Regulation, which aim to

create a more open and efficient government. However, despite these advancements, several challenges persist. The digital divide, characterised by unequal access to technology, limits the effectiveness of digital governance, especially in rural areas. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure and cybersecurity threats pose significant risks to the integrity of digital systems. Corruption remains deeply entrenched in Nigeria, with digital platforms often being exploited rather than utilised for their intended purpose.

In conclusion, while Nigeria has made notable progress in leveraging digital governance to enhance democratic processes and combat corruption, significant challenges remain. Infrastructural deficits, unequal access to technology, and persistent corrupt practices often undermine the effectiveness of these initiatives. To fully realise the potential of digital governance to foster transparency and accountability, the Nigerian government must address these challenges comprehensively. This includes investing in infrastructure, bridging the digital divide, and fostering a culture of integrity that prioritises the ethical use of technology. Only then can digital governance serve as a true catalyst for democratic advancement and the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

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