

# Fantastic Corruption and the Underdevelopment of Nigeria: The Spectators Paradigm

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## ABSTRACT

A lot of hypotheses and theories have been adduced to analyse and explain the fact of endemic corruption and its deleterious effects on the development imperatives of Nigeria, where some of these explicating assumptions have tended toward overuse and monotony, hence the need for new ideas regarding both descriptive endeavors and prescribed remedies. In all these, Nigeria, despite its supposedly flourishing potential has found it difficult to achieve the level of development that is proportional to its human and capital endowments, not as much as by other reasons than by the fact of the recycling of an insincere class of leaders who, either as former military or civilian administrators, promised to fight corruption before taking office, but do exactly the opposite, and or are enmeshed in worse corruption controversies than the previous regimes. This paper innovates on both the conceptual exposition of corruption as was captured by the former Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron and the utilization of an evolving theory-bound paradigm – the Spectators Approach to explain Nigeria’s leadership behavioral schemes in cajoling the masses to vote for them, but not doing much in line with their earlier sold promises/manifestoes, after gaining office. The paper recommends, among others, that all former presidents should be investigated and called to account regarding all direct and indirect corruption allegations levelled against them and that they should be tried where found guilty, otherwise, there would be no persuasive deterrent for future Nigerian leaders.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Fantastic Corruption, leadership, Spectators Approach, Underdevelopment.

## INTRODUCTION

In the praxis of her development efforts, what Nigeria has achieved as a sovereign nation, with more than a fair share of strategic resources, quality human capital and lofty development plans, have all benefited her, not in self-sustained development, but a mere appellative as “the giant of Africa”. That is because Nigeria has not been able to redistribute its 2021 USD 440.00 Billion (Trading Economics, 2022) to one-quarter of its population. More than any other factor, all these happen due to the fact of endemic corruption.

The foregoing depicts the precarious picture bemoaned by development experts in the review of Africa’s leading economy, Nigeria. It is such that during the much-celebrated rebasing exercise which debuted Nigeria as Africa’s fastest-growing economy in 2015, Omala (2015) lamented that rather than translate to the economic well-being of the average Nigerian, the reverse was the case, as the economic rating provided the setting upon which Nigerian political office holders intensified their loots. This has resulted in a situation where, at the turn of the 21st century, incomes per capita are just a little better than they were at independence and in some cases a good deal worse (Ghosh and Siddique, 2015). Thus, while economies are struggling to see to the decline of poverty elsewhere, Nigeria, since 2018, has gained the infamous sobriquet of the world’s poverty capital, with 93.9 per cent of its citizens currently living below the poverty line

(Uzoho, 2021). More than any other factor, all these happen due to the fact of endemic corruption.

Despite all the media hypes/policy pronouncements of former President Buhari's administration (2015-2023) on the fight against corruption, Transparency International (TI) (2022) has consistently ranked Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. The agency's 2016 report disclosed that Nigeria scored 28 points out of 100 on the 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index (Olawoyin, 2018). Before now, previous records had indicated that the country had not done so well in this regard as the corruption index in Nigeria only averaged 20.17 points from 1996 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 28 points in 2016 and a record low of 6.90 points in 1996 (Trading Economics, 2017). In the same vein, the 2020 TI corruption index scored Nigeria 25/100 (Sanni, 2021), while the 2021 ranking saw Nigeria sinking further by five places, scoring 24 out of 100 points, occupying the 154th position out of 180 countries sampled (Erezi, 2022), indicating that corruption is perceived to be worsening in the country rather than improving. Needless to mention that corruption cripples service delivery to the people.

Unfortunately, Nigeria's experience with corruption, its anti-development imperatives and the desire of the citizens to rid the country of its ills have inadvertently elevated it to a tool of manipulation by the governing elites, especially in the process of regime selection, election, endorsement or legitimization, whether as military or civilian administrators. As such, successive regimes have latched in on this, making corruption so important that it usually becomes the cardinal anchor point of campaign promises, policy advocacies and administrative sermons. Ironically, Nigeria's history with the anticorruption fight has become a cycle of trials with insincere leadership who are active crusaders outside the corridors of power but are either perpetrators of the very act of sleaze or abettors of corrupt acts while in power.

A lot of hypotheses and theories have been adduced to analyse and explain the role of leadership in the perpetuation of corruption in a developing country like Nigeria. Some of these explicating assumptions have tended toward overuse and monotony, hence the need for new ideas regarding both descriptive endeavors and prescribed remedies. The paper innovated on both the conceptual exposition of corruption as was captured by the former Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron and the utilization of an evolving theoretical bound paradigm – the Spectators Approach (Atakpa, 2020) to explain Nigeria's leadership behavioral schemes in cajoling the masses to either vote for, endorse or support them in office, but do very little in line with their earlier promises/manifestoes, after gaining office.

The interrogative aspirations of this paper, therefore, revolve around the questions: what has been the corruption disposition of successive Nigerian leaders before gaining office? How have these dispositions affected the citizens in electing or supporting them in public offices? and how have they performed in line with earlier promises to fight corruption while in office?

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

### **The Spectators Approach**

The Spectators Approach is a progressive academic, theory-bound postulation debuted by the author (see Atakpa, 2020). The approach states that policy assessors/evaluators in Nigeria are like spectators in a normal game (say soccer) who, whatever their knowledge, capacity, and skills in a particular game, often presume or arrogate to themselves, superior potentialities for better performance over the players, whereas, if and when granted the opportunity, never do better as players.

In this work, efforts are expounded to situate the spectators' approach as a slant of the classic games theory expounded by Doel and Venthoven (1993) cited in Eminue (2005), as a simulative technique of adapting a typical gaming scenario to explain political phenomena. However, this paradigm deviates slightly from the

virtual games scenario to picturise a radically different posture which factors the mode of would-be players before and during a typical game, and the reliance on those behavioral exhibitions (by the umpire – the electorate) for their selection into the actual game situation.

The potentially misleading behavioral flaunts of the would-be players are akin to the exhibitions of an intimidating driver in the game of chicken (Kahn, 1996 cited in Eminue (2005)).

The Spectators' approach is anchored on the following assumptions:

1. The Spectator(s) is constitutive of myriad categories of persons who may either have some basic skills – as professionals, amateurs, active or retired professionals, gifted players, etc. or as ordinary fans who possess no skill/capacity in the game at hand, though some may have stakes to the extent of betting on the possible outcomes of the game (wagers).
2. The spectators are relevant in the day's business only to the extent that their actions/reactions can either inspire or demoralize the players but their inputs are limited to these.
3. The choices that have a direct bearing on the outcomes of the game are determined more by the skill, training, temperament of the players, and other extraneous environmental factors, than by the direct inputs of the spectators.
4. Spectators are usually very critical of the skills, and style of play, insinuating that they would do better than the players on the pitch – if granted the opportunity.
5. By such agitations and self-promotion, some spectators sometimes get themselves or their nominees selected to play the next game whereas, they (and their nominees) perform below expectations.
6. The former players who are now spectators become even more critical of the current players (incumbents), claiming capacity for superior performance than at formerly granted opportunities.
7. Unfortunately, the handlers of the team, probably influenced by the claims and counter-claims (cheers and boos) of the spectators, keep rotating between successive critical spectators who possess no capacity to change the game beyond platitudes and excuses for not performing in the penultimate game.
8. As the cycle continues, game outcomes keep diminishing since spectators who return as players do so in poor form and depreciating capacities, in which case, some critical spectators had better remain spectators than players.

Concerning the Nigerian public service experience, the players are incumbent public office holders who are responsible for the policy choices of the day, implementing the same for the whole gamut of the society, while the spectators are a mass of relevant citizens including stakeholders, commentators, former rulers, opposition party men, election losers, aspiring leaders, their supporters and the ordinary citizens whose role on the policy choices or decision-making processes of the day are only marginal though likely affected by the output processes (outcomes of policy). In terms of relevance to the policy process of the day, incumbents play the dominant role (as policy-makers) and are the greatest determinants of policy outcomes. While some relevant citizens may possess some form of skills and experience in policy processes, others possess neither experience nor skill or capacity or will. Nevertheless, this set of citizens is very critical of the entire policy process, claiming superior knowledge, skills and capacity to make and implement better policies than the incumbents.

Unfortunately, the electorate (the handlers of the team), probably impressed by the claims and counterclaims (cheers and boos) of the spectators, keep rotating between successive critical masses of spectators who possess neither capacity nor will to change the game beyond platitudes and excuses for not performing in the penultimate game. As the cycle continues, the policy-making process, its implementation and outcomes keep diminishing since policy-makers who return as players do so in poor form and depreciating capacities, in which case, some formally tested critical politicians had better remain spectators than players.

## THE SPECTATORS SYNDROME



**Source:** Infographic by Author, 2022

As it relates to this paper, the value of this approach to explain successive Nigerian leadership roles and behavior in the fight against corruption directly corresponds with Pini Jason's 1988 hypothesis that the decibel of an average Nigerian's public outcry (against government incompetence and corruption) is directly proportional to his distance from the opportunity to do exactly what he condemns. Jason believed that the difference between many a vociferous, sanctimonious and pontificating Nigerian kleptomaniac is probably the absence of opportunity to steal and that in all probability, yesterday's moral crusader is likely to crumble and disappear under the weight of corruption. Jason insisted that all Nigerians in government are thieves, as those who are not in government are not necessarily better but may only be waiting to displace those in power, so they can 'out-steal' them (Ojewale, 2020).

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### Fantastic Corruption

The contextualisation of the term 'fantastic corruption' as utilised in this paper is inspired by the 'caught-in-camera' comment of the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, who, at the eve of the anti-corruption summit held in London in 2016 (Chan, 2016), christened the country as a 'fantastically corrupt country', a euphemistic adjective labelling Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In an attempt to contextualise the term, Abati (2016) resorted to the dictionary meaning of the word 'fantastic' which means 'something so extreme as to be unbelievable, strange, most unlikely, extra-ordinary to buttress his point. Invariably, this implies that corruption in Nigeria is so extreme as to be unbelievable, strange, most unlikely, and extraordinary.

In an ironic, though somewhat canny twist to the implication of this labelling, it was reported that the former Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023), while responding to probes on this negative christening, admitted that Nigeria was fantastically corrupt, asking Britain for help to secure the return of assets that were taken out of Nigeria by corrupt leaders. Beyond this rhetoric, the concept of fantastic corruption, though a seemingly new term in the lexicon of the subject matter, directly correlates with already existing adumbrations of systemic or endemic corruption. It points to a situation where corruption becomes an integrated and essential aspect of the economic, social and political system. It points to a condition where corruption is embedded in a wider situation that helps sustain it, and where the major institutions and processes of the state are routinely dominated and used by corrupt individuals and groups.

Fantastic corruption also connotes a situation where most people may have no alternatives than to have to deal with corrupt officials (Byrne, 2007). The influence of corruption makes it fantastic where it is so strong and sustained that most people have come to accept it as a *fait accompli*, that is, not only do citizens accept it as a part of their daily life experience but more frighteningly, they feel powerless to address the phenomenon at any level (see Lewis, 1996).

At another level of analysis, the fantastic corruption mantra also corresponds positively to the vestiges of political corruption (grand) corruption, which, as a thesis of this paper, denotes an enabler of all other forms of corruption. Byrne (2007) describes political corruption as one that takes place at the high levels of the political system, when politicians and state agents entitled to make and enforce the laws in the name of the people, are using the same authority to sustain their power, status and wealth. He maintains that this type of corruption not only leads to the misallocation of resources but also perverts how decisions are made. This also portrays a situation where the laws and regulations are abused by the rulers, side-stepped, ignored, or even tailored to fit their interests, as well as when the legal bases, against which corrupt practices are usually evaluated and judged, are weak and subject to downright encroachment by the rulers. Yet a very unique feature of political corruption is that it facilitates transactions between private and public sector actors through which collective goods are illegitimately converted into private-regarding payoffs.

It is in the context of the above that the British Prime Minister's conversation with the Queen, where he voiced out his invectives on Nigeria's corruption toga, likely demonstrates his aversion to the role of leadership in his conception of the country as a fantastically corrupt entity. This is more reinforced by the Prime Minister's announcement, "We've got some leaders of some fantastically corrupt countries coming to Britain" (Chan, 2016). Further fillip was given to the leadership/fantastic corruption nexus at the May 10, 2021 happenings at Buckingham Palace. It was reported that in an attempt by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby to burnish the image of President Buhari (given his positive perception of the President at the time), the Archbishop had stated 'but this particular president is not corrupt...he is trying very hard'. In response, the Speaker of the British Parliament, John Bercow insisted that President Buhari was 'coming at his expense' (BBC News, 2016), suggesting doubt at the claims of the Archbishop. This doubt was corroborated by Abati (2016) while taking cognisance of the 'game' features of international diplomacy. Abati had equated this doubt with high-wire politics, insisting that the President's team needed to decode the signal that Britain was probably not too pleased with the projected long-term impact of former President Buhari's anti-corruption campaign. Fantastic corruption, therefore, entails a state of affairs in which corruption is so extreme as to be unbelievable, strange, most unlikely, and extra-ordinary that most citizens, even the hitherto incorruptible ones, being overwhelmed by its ubiquitous currents, tend to accept it willy-nilly, as part of the norm, without which they may not survive in the fantastically corrupt system.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative strategy in the collection of data and innovation on extant literature and typologies, woven in such a way as to point to the possibilities in new theoretical postulations. In essence, the paper is inclined toward the evolution of the Spectators approach, not just as a subset of the classical games theory, but also as a fresh theoretical endeavor for the understanding of the demeanor of public sector players before and after gaining public office in Nigeria.

### Leadership, Spectators Syndrome, and Fantastic Corruption in Nigeria

The argument that leadership is that veritable platform through which corruption festers to the extent of earning Nigeria the sobriquet of a fantastically corrupt country is quite persuasive, as captured by Ogbeidi (2012:2):

The history of the political development of Nigeria since independence has shown that the reins of

government have always fallen into the hands of a political leadership class that showed more interest in private, group or ethnic gains than in the general wellbeing of the Nigerian state. In all, political power has alternated between the civilian and the military since independence and neither of the two categories that ruled the country has done better in terms of corruption ratings. Indeed, the political leadership class has succeeded in entrenching corruption by providing a fertile ground and an environment conducive for the phenomenon to thrive incurably at the expense of national socio-economic, cultural and political development.

The record by Ekong (2015) has it that from the First Republic superintended by the duo of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, as Prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikwe as the President, corruption was widespread. This was instanced in the events that led to the 1962 Justice Coker Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate corrupt practices in Western Nigeria. It was this Commission that uncovered the diversion of millions of pounds belonging to Western Region Marketing Boards, fingering Obafemi Awolowo, the first premier of Western Region as the culprit (Ekong, 2015). Similar official inquiries discovered widespread corrupt practices in the Eastern Region (Adamu, 2015). Thus, it was under the prevailing situation of widespread corruption, among other factors, that a group of young middle-rank army officers sacked the government of the day in a military coup d'état on January 15, 1966 (Austine et al., 2013; BBC News, 2016).

General Yakubu Gowon who ruled Nigeria during her years of stupendous wealth marked by the oil boom of the 1970s, was viewed as timid in his much-touted fight against corrupt elements in his government (Cynado, 2019). General Gowon who was once quoted as regretting that his regime had not fulfilled its promise to wipe out corruption in Nigeria, was also credited with the infamous declaration that the problem with Nigeria was not money but how to spend it (Austine et al., 2013). All this gives credence to the assertion by Ogbeidi (2012) that the zeal to punish wrongdoers of the First Republic died with the Gowon coup of July 1966, which ousted the Ironsi government because the politicians in detention were freed. This development had serious implications for the polity as the new set of rulers embarked on white elephant projects, which served as a means of looting public funds.

Though the Murtala Muhammed regime (29 July 1975 – 13 February 1976) did not last long, it is perhaps the only administration reckoned with as having undertaken the most drastic measures to fight corruption. After a military coup that brought him to power in 1975, the administration not only set up an investigative panel that indicted all the twelve military governors that served under Gen. Yakubu Gowon but also made far-reaching reforms that gave birth to the “purge” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murtala\\_Mohammed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murtala_Mohammed)). Under the “purge”, top federal and state officials (more than 10,000 of them including the judiciary, police, armed forces, diplomatic service, public corporations, and universities) criticized for the misuse of power during the Gowon administration, were dismissed without benefits for acts of corruption and other forms of malpractices (Hassan & Musa, 2010). Nevertheless, some analysts like Ogunna (1999) and Musa (2001) are critical of the “purge” claiming, among others, that it destroyed the sense of security that the public servants enjoyed, eroded their self-confidence and undermined their devotion to duty.

It is generally believed that Nigeria's attempt at fighting corruption and its image in the comity of nations took a nose-dive with the coming into power of military President, Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in 1985. Citing Maduagwu (1993), Anazodo et.al. (2012) highlight some of the controversies that decked the Babangida's administration in corrupt adornments including \$200 million siphoned from the Aluminum and Smelter project, N400 million wasted on the Better Life project and the huge extra budgeting spending of N186.9 billion naira between 1989 and 1993. The 1994 Okigbo Panel Report on the Reorganization and Reform of the Central Bank of Nigeria indicted General Babangida's regime for mismanaging about \$12.4 billion oil windfall between 1988 and 1994, revealing that the regime conspired with top officials of the Central Bank of Nigeria to squander the entire fortune on unproductive or dubious projects (Okigbo Panel Report, 1994). In the view of Ogbeidi (2012), if anything, corruption reached an alarming rate and became

institutionalized during Babangida's regime, such that leaders found guilty by tribunals under the Murtaala Mohammed and Mohammadu Buhari regimes found their way back to public life and recovered their seized properties. Citing Gboyega (1996), Ogbeyi emphasized that "not only did the regime encourage corruption by pardoning corrupt officials convicted by his predecessors and returning their seized properties, the regime also officially sanctioned corruption in the country and made it difficult to apply the only potent measures, long prison terms and seizure of ill-gotten wealth, for fighting corruption in Nigeria in the future.

According to Danfulani (2013), the kleptocratic regime of Gen. Sani Abacha which is viewed as one of the most corrupt in the history of the nation was not left out in attempts at cleansing the system of corruption because it established the Failed Banks Tribunal that investigated unethical practices in the country's banking sector. This was however considered as playing to the gallery as Anazodo et al. (2012) insist that Abacha's loot tops the list of grand corruption in the history of Nigeria. Reports by Anazodo et al. (2012); Danfulani (2013) indicate that Abacha's family and their cronies looted about 3 billion dollars hidden in foreign accounts across Europe and the Persian Gulf. Abacha was described as the "biggest thief" of the 1990s and was alleged to have sent between \$12 to 16 billion dollars out of Nigeria during his five-year reign (Enweremadu, 2013). A report by Probe International (2002) believes that the extent of Abacha's venality seemed to have surpassed that of other notorious African rulers, such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Though it may be difficult to estimate the exact amount looted by the late general, Transparency International reported that Abacha may have stolen up to \$5bn between 1993 when he assumed office and 1998 when he died (Vanguard, 2020), an amount which successive governments have made recoveries from.

The year 1999 marked the commencement of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in the election of General Olusegun Obasanjo as the President who, while acknowledging that corruption had been allowed to assume an "unbridled" status in the country's body polity, promised to deal with the menace "no matter whose ox is gored". General Olusegun Obasanjo established two special anti-graft bodies – the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), inaugurated on 29th September 2000 (to target corruption in the public sector, especially cases of bribery, gratification, graft, and abuse or misuse of office) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), established in 2003 to investigate people in all sectors who appear to be living above their means.

Although more than 100 suspects were convicted and property worth N11 billion recovered from corrupt Nigerians since the establishment of EFCC (Ribadu, 2010), Danfulani (2013) regrets that corruption kept spreading like bushfire as various corruption scandals broke out under Obasanjo's presidency. Danfulani (2013) decries the fact that throughout the eight-years-presidency of Obasanjo, the petroleum ministry he was in charge of was embroiled in high-level corrupt practices as over the \$400 million invested on the Turn-Around Maintenance (TAM) and repairs of refineries. Apart from the scandal concerning the ownership of shares at Transcorp by former President Obasanjo, an action that violated the code of conduct standards for public officers, the former president was alleged to have widely facilitated his failed campaign to alter the constitution to get a third term by actively bribing the legislature and further deepening corruption at the highest levels.

Most scandalous is the alleged spending of a whopping \$16bn on a power project during the Obasanjo administration, without a corresponding power supply to Nigeria, in which the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project had requested prosecution after revelations from the House of Representative's hearing on the matter (Premium Times, 2016; Adetayo, 2018). All these negated whatever sincerities there were on the part of President Obasanjo about fighting corruption in Nigeria (Adamu, 2015). Pundits like Adekeye (2003) and Ogbeyi (2012) insist that despite all the anti-corruption measures and institutions established during this period,

the desired results were not achieved, thereby casting doubt on the capability of such institutions to

effectively stem the menace of corruption.

Between 2007 and 2010, under the leadership of the late President Umaru Yar’adua, the anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria witnessed, among other measures, the stoppage of the practice of “warehousing of money” and the prescription that all unspent monies, at the end of the budget circle, should be returned to the treasury. There was also the institution of the policy of e-payment for the settlement of all federal government obligations, reforms in the banking sector that resulted in the removal and subsequent trial of some bank executives and the introduction of a bill for a non-conviction-based asset forfeiture system in Nigeria. The Yar’adua administration also established a regulatory framework for the control and management of assets both before and after confiscation (Adeniyi, 2011). Unfortunately, the perception of Yar’adua as a non-corrupt president was largely undermined by scandals which portrayed the administration as protecting the interest of the corrupt. This was largely attributed to perceived weakness on the part of the President. Some of such scandals included the use of the former Attorney General of the Federation, Michael Aondoaka to frustrate local and international investigations of Yar’adua’s powerful friends like Governor Ibori of Delta State, Igbinnedion of Edo State and Governor Peter Odili of River State. Indeed, AG Aondoaka became so powerful that he got the President to transfer the control of anti-corruption agencies (the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Code of Conduct Bureau) to him. With this power, Aondoaka frustrated the British Government’s operation code-named “Operation Tureen on James Ibori, Adebimpe Pogoso and Udoamaka Okoronkwo” who were to be extradited to the UK for crimes bordering on diversion of funds belonging to Delta State (Adeniyi, 2011).

President Goodluck Jonathan, after assuming office in 2010, registered what was initially considered a watershed in the fight against corruption when, in May 2011, he signed the Freedom of Information Act. This law was predicated on the need to usher Nigeria into the league of countries where transparency in governance is entrenched and citizens are granted unfettered access to information about government activities. This, coupled with other measures like the setting up of the Presidential Pension Reform Task Team, and the sponsorship of the Administration of Criminal Justice (ACJ) Bill 2012, were acknowledged as preparing the grounds for the fight against corruption. Most unfortunately, these appear to have been the farthest the war against corruption could go under the Jonathan administration. The Guardian Newspaper (2013) described Jonathan’s fight against corruption as a ruse, insisting that despite grandstanding by the Jonathan government or its officials and protestations to the contrary, there was no war being prosecuted against the devastating scourge; and that there was therefore no reason to speak of any success or failure of any war. This disposition was certainly not unconnected with the many corruptions related scandals that dotted the years of the Jonathan Presidency, including, but not limited to the following:

1. The controversial granting of state pardon to former Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief Diepreye Soloman Alamieyesehga and former Managing Director, Bank of the North, Mr Shetima Bulama who were convicted for money laundering and corrupt enrichment. This was condemned by a cross-section of citizens, civil society organizations and the international community (see Edukugho, 2013);
2. In 2014, Lamido Sanusi, the former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria informed President Goodluck Jonathan that the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) had failed to remit US\$20 billion of oil revenues, which it owed the state. Instead of probing the claim, President Jonathan dismissed the claim and sacked Sanusi for alleged mismanagement of the central bank’s budget;
3. There was the scandal involving Jonathan’s Aviation Minister, Stella Odua who allegedly purchased two amor-plated BMW vehicles at an inflated cost of N225 million without the required budgetary backing but which the President tried to defend in a statement that the cars were not the personal property of the Minister but of the office of the Aviation Ministry, and that no cost was too high to protect public officers who were carrying out desired changes (see Osun Defender, 2014);



4. During the public outcry against the former Minister for Petroleum Resources, Diezani Allison-Madueke who was accused by federal lawmakers, of squandering N10 billion to charter and maintain a private jet for personal use, President Jonathan, during a Presidential media chat, defended her, admonishing the legislators should leave her to do her job (see Ekot, 2014);
5. While analysing 20 corruption cases and scandals in Nigeria (2011-2015), Isaac (2015) listed the N192 billion Maina Pension scam, the Kerosene subsidy scam, the \$6 billion fuel subsidy scam, the N123 billion fraud involving a former Head of Service, Stephen Oronsanya, the N32.8 billion Police pension fraud, the Abba Moro Immigration recruitment scandal, the \$1.1 billion Malabu Oil scandal, the crude oil theft scandal, the \$2.1 billion arms deal scandal, the Ekiti gate, the \$500 Million defence contract scam, the Faruk Lawan \$3 million bribery scandal, the N6 billion bribe to Christian religious leaders, the \$250 million plus security contracts to militants in the Niger Delta, among others, as most of the largely unresolved corruption-related cases where no concrete actions were taken to punish offenders and or recover stolen government funds during the Jonathan administration.

When all these, plus subsequent startling revelations unearthed by the corruption investigation institutions under former President Buhari's administration are weighed against former Goodluck Jonathan's 2015 assertion that 'equating corruption to stealing was wrong', one is persuaded to the rather painful conclusion that the Jonathan administration was merely playing to the gallery with its anti-corruption gospel.

The prevailing negative perception of former President Jonathan's handling of corruption matters made the 2015 election in Nigeria a decision on where to stand in the fight against corruption, just as the former United States Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Linda Thomas-Greenfield had declared that it was important that when people went to the polls, they had 'to vote against corruption' (Nigeria News Update, 2015). As such, whatever negative profiling may have impinged Gen. Mohammadu Buhari's era as military head of state, paled into insignificance as Nigerians tended to trust his assertion that he will, if elected, lead the way, with the force of personal example and that there will be no confusion as to where he stands, as 'corruption will have no place and the corrupt will not be appointed into my administration' (Nigeria News Update, 2015), thereby voting for him instead of the incumbent Goodluck Johnathan.

A few months into his administration, President Buhari and the Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo had declared their assets, as well as inaugurated the Presidential Advisory Committee against Corruption (Ezeamalu, 2015). The administration also directed the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) to promote transparency in the management of government funds and prevent hitherto ignored leakages of legitimate income meant for the federation account (Nda-Isaiah, 2016). In another bold step, the Biometric Verification Number (BVN) and the Whistle Blowing policies were introduced (Tade, 2021). Within its 120 days of introduction, the anti-corruption agencies received over 2000 tip-offs, chief among which was the \$9.8 million found in the house of a former NNPC executive and another \$40 million allegedly belonging to the National Intelligence Agency in Ikoyi apartment (Governance, 2017). President Buhari also signed a Judicial Agreement on Extradition, Transfer of Sentenced Persons, Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters, and Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal and Commercial Matters with the United Arab Emirates, which included the recovery and repatriation of stolen wealth (Jonathan, 2016). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC seemed to have received a new verve in its investigations, arrests and prosecution, and as captured by Campbell (2018), the anti-corruption agency doubled the rate of convictions (603 convictions in 2018), recovered some 500 billion naira in stolen public funds. Some of the high-profile corruption convictions included that of the former governor of Taraba State, former Governor of Plateau State, Joshua Dariye, former Governor of Abia State, Orji Uzor Kalu (though later released through a legal technicality), Jolly Nyame and a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Joseph Nwobike, convicted on twelve counts of attempting to prevent the cause of justice. Other politicians prosecuted by the EFCC were: then Senate President, Bukola Saraki, Oliseh Metu, Raymond Dojpesi, Femi Fani-Kayode, Stella Odua, Diezani Allison-Madueke, former petroleum minister, the former National Security Adviser to

President Johnathan, Sambo Dasuki, among others (Abukakar, 2022).

It was natural that President Buhari received commendations, not only from Nigerians but also from the international community, for wagging what many thought of as ‘an unprecedented’ war against corruption. A critic of international repute, the Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka (in 2016) eulogized President Buhari’s anti-corruption war as the biggest in the history of Nigeria and when asked if the war could stop abruptly like those of the previous administration, he answered, “I don’t think that will happen this time and the reason is this: we have not had corruption being exposed on this scale before. We have not had a situation where it is being alleged and increasingly proved that money that was supposed to have been spent on defending our nation, ourselves, and our neighbourhood has been shared among individuals” (Ajani et al. 2016).

Much to the chagrin of anti-corruption crusaders like Prof. Wole Soyinka, Nigerians and the international community, it appeared as if the cotton had already dropped rather too early in Buhari’s administration. As captured by Tade (2021), issues like the politicization of the anti-corruption fight where party politics is seen as shielding the prosecution of people loyal to those in power cast doubt on the fight. Tade buttressed his point citing a statement credited to the former chairman of the ruling All Progressive Congress, Adams Oshiomole asking defectors from opposition parties to join the governing party and have their sins forgiven.

A similar reference was the President’s slow pace in acting over the Senate’s indictment of the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Babachir Lawal, accused of diverting N544 meant for the rehabilitation of the North East under his watch (Oluwagbemi, 2017). It took the Presidency which had initially absolved Lawal of allegations levelled against him in January 2017 (BBC News, 2017) some 4 months to suspend Lawal from office and another 6 months to sack him despite outcries from Nigerians. Even at the point of being sacked, many Nigerians were not impressed because he was neither arrested nor tried until February 2019, fueling the belief that the action was only undertaken at a time considered auspicious to impress Nigerians just before the 2019 election (Vanguard, 2019).

One of the worse of the cases that portrayed the Buhari presidency as adopting double standards in fighting corruption was the case involving the former Acting Chairman of EFCC who, being considered in some quarters as superintending over ‘that arm of the ruling party used for the victimization of opponents/enemies’ (Abukakar, 2022), was indicted for corruption and gross violation of human rights by the Department of State Services (DSS) and the Senate, whereas the president re-nominated him again and again for confirmation as substantive Chairman of the Commission. That was before he was finally suspended from office in July 2020 following a memo by the Attorney General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami, confirming that he may have indeed mismanaged recovered loot (Nwabufo, 2017; Owolabi, 2021).

Indeed, cases like these made the 2017 allegation by Ayodele Fayose (former governor of Ekiti State) very hard to discountenance. Fayose had accused President Buhari of running a double standard government where he treats corruption involving his men as a ‘family affair’. He decried the slow pace in the handling of Magu’s case, as well as the \$25 billion allegations made against Maikanti Baru, Group Managing Director of the Nigerian Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) by Ibe Kachikwu, Minister of Petroleum Resources (Nasiru, 2017). Although the Presidency denied Kachikwu’s leaked memo, which contents were later confirmed to be untrue by an investigation carried out by Premium Times, Ezeamalu (2017) reveals that Nigerians may not have been fully convinced owing to how prior cases like the one involving the sacked Secretary to the Government of the Federation and the former Director General of the Nigerian Intelligence Agency, Ayo Oke were handled (Ohwovoriole, 2017).

As if to confirm its ambiguous stand on the acclaimed fight against corruption, the Buhari administration, under the aegis of the National Council of State, on April 14, 2022, granted a state pardon to former governors Joshua Dariye of Plateau State and Jolly Nyame of Taraba State, among other 157 convicted

persons. This raised controversies in some quarters, for instance, while the human rights lawyer, Mr Femi Falana, SAN, lamented that the same man (Buhari) who said he came to fight corruption was now granting pardon to the men who stole billions of Naira, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), the Nigerian partner of Transparency International expressed concerns over what it termed as ‘pardon to remorseless convicts’. Comparing Buhari’s state pardon to a similar action during former President Johnathan’s administration, a Premium Times analysis concluded that if Jonathan’s pardon for Mr Alamieyesgha could be interpreted as encouraging corruption, Mr Buhari’s pardon amounted to not only emboldening corruption but also moving a step further to rubbish the efforts of those fighting it and frustrating whatever hope there was about winning the war against corruption (see Adesomoju, 2022).

These misgivings also played out in 2019 when the Human Rights Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) condemned what they termed, ‘the continuous manifestation of deep-rooted double standards’ in the anti-graft crusade of President Buhari’s administration, alleging the administration’s failure to adopt constitutional measures in prosecuting all indicted top security officials in the alleged arms procurement scandal, like the Minister of Interior, Lt. Gen. Abdulrahman Danbazau and the National Security Adviser, Maj. Gen. Babagana Monguno (Olaniyi, 2019). All these tend to justify the diatribe by Senator Shehu Sani that ‘we are in a situation where perfume is sprayed on corruption when it affects Buhari’s men while insecticide is sprayed on corruption when it involves perceived political opponents of the President’. These also create serious credibility questions on the anti-corruption crusade that won accolades at the inception of the regime but ended just like the failed claims of preceding regimes. Thus, the Nigerian economy remains the loser, dovetailing in economic backwardness, abject poverty and unemployment, extreme inequality, social exclusionism, insecurity and underdevelopment.

### **Corruption and the Underdevelopment of Nigeria**

Corruption has been variously described as the bane of Nigeria’s development (Onya & Elemanya, 2016; Ogbeidi, 2012; Cynado, 2019). Commenting on the possible effects of corruption on development in Nigeria, Atakpa & Akpan (2023) observe that such effects are deleterious and overwhelming, in that the monies diverted by public officials are public funds that should have been utilized for the overall development of the society. That is besides the fact that such diversions also result in the continuous widening of the income gap between the few corrupt officials and the general public who do not have access to such funds. As noted by Austine et al., (2013), the corrupt depletion of Nigeria’s treasury and the country’s chronic condition of indebtedness results in the dearth of resources for investment in socio-economic development. This economic condition predisposes the country to instability, as the masses are always engaged in some form of agitation against the ruling class and between.

Corruption is synonymous with indiscipline that results in a state of lawlessness; a situation paints the country in a bad light and discourages foreign investments (Igbaekemen et al., 2014). It also discourages foreign aid and deprives the country of development avenues and technical assistance, especially worse for the country’s largely import technology-dependent economy (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023).

Widespread corruption impugns the development capabilities of the state, earning the state the inglorious deposition of a weak state, weak state structures and weak institutions. All these mean that enforcement mechanisms are undermined, where crimes and all forms of ills are perpetuated without adequate checks or control (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023). Weak state structures result in poor policy implementation, total policy failures, increasing poverty and corresponding resort to crime and general insecurity.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The paper innovated on both the ‘fantastic corruption’ exposition by the former Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron and the theory-bound paradigm – the Spectators’ Approach to explain Nigeria’s leadership

behavioural schemes in cajoling the masses to vote for them, but not doing much after gaining office, and concluded that the fact of the recycling of such insincere class of leaders who, do exactly the opposite of what they promised by either engaging in or encouraging or condoning grand corruption, is the bane of Nigeria's development.

Implied in the above conclusion are the following submissions:

That no Nigerian leader, especially during the fourth republic has kept strictly to the tenets of the anti-corruption crusade, enough to discourage or abate or rid the country of the ills of grand corruption;

Since leadership is an inevitable instrument in the fight against corruption, the compromising posture of successive Nigerian leaders has encouraged, rather than discouraged all other forms of corruption thereby relegating Nigeria further by five places among countries sampled by Transparency International in 2021; and

That more than any other factor, the development woes of the country are attributable to the fact of endemic corruption.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on above submissions, the paper recommends as follows:

- That Nigerian citizens should be alive to the civic societal activism/responsibilities and should not rest on their oars in reporting as well as blowing the whistle on corrupt activities of political leaders, both past and present;
- That all former presidents should be investigated and called to account regarding all direct and indirect corruption allegations levelled against them and that they should be tried where found guilty, otherwise there would be no persuasive deterrent for future Nigerian leaders;
- That a special commission should be established by an act of parliament to undertake the implementation of the preceding recommendation; and
- That henceforth, the Nigerian electorate, should deprive all political gladiators with any tinge of verified corruption history, of their votes irrespective of party or regional affiliations and rather risk their votes on fresh clean aspirants in a manner of voting behavior that was exhibited in the inconclusive but celebrated election of Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola in 1993.

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