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## Research Article

# Why Corruption in Nigeria? Experts' Accounts on the Occurrences and Persistence

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Corruption is increasingly becoming commonplace in Nigeria. Recent discoveries of hidden corrupt funds in Nigeria by anti-corruption agencies, particularly the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), give insight into how severe the menace has become. The amount recovered during the early part of 2017 is shocking, despite the renewed effort to fight corruption by the present administration in Nigeria and, by extension, past governments. This has prompted the question of why corruption occurs and persists in Nigeria. To satisfy this urge, we believe that getting those involved in corruption will be of great significance in unraveling the reality of the issue. However, thoughtfully considering the situation in Nigeria, where, in most instances, even those caught in corrupt acts with overwhelming evidence often deny being corrupt and are ever ready to go to any length in proving their innocence, we oblige for a workable alternative, which is to meet experts from the anti-corruption agencies and get their perspectives on this. We believe that through these experts, who have been interacting with corrupt officers as investigators and prosecutors, the reality of the matter will be revealed. Their experiences and understanding of the anti-corruption efforts can lead us to uncover why the occurrences and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. In achieving this goal, we conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with the two anti-corruption bodies. Using thematic analysis, we find that six reasons explain why corruption occurs and then persists in Nigeria.

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## Introduction

The recent wave of discoveries of stolen funds hidden in various parts of Nigeria is an indication of the intensity of corruption in Nigeria. Between February and April 2017, there were startling revelations of hidden corrupt monies traced to various locations in the country. Due to the intensity of corruption in the country, the government, through its anti-corruption watchdog, has introduced the idea of whistleblowing with attractive incentives (Daniel, 2017). The new whistleblower will now, as stipulated by the policy, be given 5% of the recovered corrupt proceeds for any amount below one billion naira. Up to 5 billion naira will attract 4% for the

extra 4 billion naira in excess of the first one billion, and so on (Daniel, 2017). Based on tips, on 3rd February 2017, officials of the EFCC raided a building belonging to Andrew Yakubu, the former Group Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and recovered \$9.8 million and £74,000 (Vanguard, 2017b). One of the officials of EFCC who was at the scene narrated:

“When the safe was opened, it was discovered that it contained the sum of \$9,772,800 (Nine Million, Seven Hundred and Seventy-Two Thousand, Eight Hundred United States Dollars) and another sum of £74,000 (Seventy-Four Thousand Pound Sterling)” (Vanguard, 2017b).

Similarly, acting on tips by another whistleblower on the 12th of April 2017, they found \$43.4 million, £27,800, and ₦23.2 million in a private residence along Gerrard Road, Ikoyi, in Lagos state (Daniel, 2017; Mike, 2017). This came two days after the EFCC had made another discovery from a Bureau De Change market in Balogun Market in Lagos. Another whistleblower on the 10th of April led the operatives of the EFCC, and the operation succeeded in recovering an approximate sum of ₦250 million comprising £547,730, €21,090, and ₦5,648,500 (DailyTrust, 2017; Daniel, 2017; Vanguard, 2017a). Earlier, a week before, another sum of ₦449,000,860 was found hidden in an abandoned shop in Lagos, of which the owner(s) are yet to be ascertained (Daniel, 2017).

These recent discoveries are an indication of the deteriorating level that corruption has reached in Nigeria. As it has been captured in the literature and as observed by Agbibo (2012), to say that Nigeria is corrupt is to state the indisputable. Therefore, prompted by these shocking revelations and discoveries, this paper asks the following questions: Why corruption in Nigeria? Why does it occur in the first place, and why does it persist? In answering these questions and others, this study believes that the best way is getting those involved and obtaining their perspectives on the phenomenon. Knowing fully well that getting corrupt public officers' perspectives on why they are corrupt will be very difficult, particularly in countries such as Nigeria, we now have a second thought. This time around, it is to get the understanding of experts from the anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria who have had vast experiences relating to the corrupt officers as anti-corruption watchdogs. Essentially, these experts from the anti-corruption agencies have, on so many occasions, investigated, interviewed, interrogated, and conducted searches on the corrupt public servants. Hence, getting their understanding and worldviews is essential in answering the above questions. It is in view of the foregoing that this paper intends to find out the reasons for the occurrence and persistence of corruption in Nigeria based on the experiences of the anti-corruption experts in relation to their dealings with corrupt officers. The paper is divided into five sections, beginning with the introductory part, which is the current section. The next section is on literature, which is followed by section three detailing the methodology employed. The fourth section covers the analysis and presentation of the results, while the fifth section discusses the results and concludes the paper.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholars differ significantly on the origin of corruption in Nigeria. Whereas part of the argument suggests African cultures to be directly responsible for corruption

in Nigeria, others link the problem with the attainment of independence, which paved the way for the emergence of indigenous leaders. However, part of the literature documents the origin of corruption in Nigeria to predate the independence of Nigeria, emanating right from the colonial era (Imhonopi & Urim, 2013; Osoba, 1996; Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013), thereby suggesting the link between colonialism and the culture of corruption.

Similarly, Ogbeidi (2012) posits that the discussion on corruption in Nigeria will be meaningless and inconclusive without going down the history and tracing the genesis of corruption from the colonial era to the successive governments that ruled the country from independence to the present. It is apparent from this submission that the association of the origin of corruption in Nigeria is to the twin contributions of colonialism and the attainment of independence. Agreeing with this position, Atelhe & Agada (2014) trace the origin of corruption to the commencement of public administration in Nigeria, thus giving rise to Western education, the process of urbanization, the monetization of the economy, as well as the beginning of exchanges. Also, the introduction of indirect rule, particularly in the southern part of the country, had created the urge to become leaders or to hold public offices at all costs and through all means, be it legal or otherwise.

According to the third view, corruption is deemed to have originated from the indigenous African culture (Agbibo, 2012; Nye, 1967), and it is deeply rooted in the attitudes of Nigerians. As observed by the report of the colonial government in 1947, the African culture and its perception regarding public morality are fundamentally different from that of the British (Ogbeidi, 2012), and it promotes corrupt behaviors in public services. To a large extent, the foregoing submission by the report vividly describes contemporary Nigeria, as many see no wrong in wasting public resources.

Bringing the different camps together, Osoba (1996) submits that corruption in Nigeria stands for a social virus, which is a combination of traits of anti-social behavior inherited from British colonial masters and those emanated and hatched by the indigenous Nigerians. Notwithstanding the position one takes in the argument, the role of colonialism in sowing the seed of a corrupt African society is an important factor to be reckoned with when discussing corruption in Nigeria.

Fundamentally, the colonial rulers paved the way for corruption to thrive in Nigeria through their policy of indirect rule on one hand and, on the other, through their haphazard selection of local leaders who could serve their interest at all costs. See (Agbibo, 2012; Casimir, Izueke, & Nzekwe, 2014; Osoba, 1996; Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013) for example. Consequently, the new rulers selected

by the colonial masters adopted the European way of life as they became power-drunk and exhibited an ostentatious lifestyle (Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013), and this led to their eventual corrupt practices against the state and the citizenry.

Similarly, Osoba (1996) observes that the manner of the colonial authoritarian leadership had led to a crisis of accumulation in which the whites were seen as destined to be rich and the blacks to be poor. He notes that after the Second World War, this quest for accumulation created a rift between the colonial masters and the emerging new Nigerian capitalists, also known as foster elites. It, therefore, follows that the upcoming Nigerian capitalists challenged the colonial masters, thus paving the way for a change in both capital accumulation and the government structure (Osoba, 1996). Not only were the so-called rulers loyal to the colonial masters seen as indulging in the corruption saga, but surprisingly, even the nationalists championing the cause of independence were at one time or another found wanting in the corruption issue.

(Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013) observe that the Foster-Suttan Commission of Inquiry, set up to investigate the affairs of the African Continental Bank, a possession of the then Eastern Nigeria Regional Government, indicted a nationalist, the leader of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, of corruption. They maintain that the leader was charged with an offense for investing funds belonging to the public in a bank in which he had a stake. Accordingly, he was compelled to forfeit his rights as well as interests in the bank to the then Eastern Regional Government (Tignor, 1981 cited in Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013). Similarly, the Justice Coker Commission of Inquiry, instituted in the 1960s in order to investigate the affairs of some top government functionaries of the then Western region, found some prominent figures wanting (Tignor, 1981 cited in Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013).

Included was Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the premier of the Western region as well as the political leader of the Action Group Party, one of the parties that vehemently struggled for the independence of the country (Ojukwu & Shopeju, 2010). Furthermore, corruption cases were associated with some native authority officials in Borno province from the Northern region, and these officers were sanctioned appropriately (Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013).

### 3. Methodology

We find it very relevant to employ qualitative research methodology in this study. We are interested in the social construction of reality of our informants, who are experts from the anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria. We

believe these experts have the knowledge and experiences it takes to share their worldview and understanding of the phenomenon of study. Thus, we purposefully selected our informants based on their suitability for the intent of the study. A variant form of purposeful sampling technique we adopted is the snowballing technique. We begin by identifying the best person who could offer insights into answering our research objective. Subsequently, through a chain of referrals, we get the other participants. Our goal is to obtain rich data through a thick description of the phenomenon. We conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with 24 experts from the two leading anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria. Data generated from these interviews were recorded using a digital recording device, with notes appropriately taken to complement the recorded interview. As the instruments for data collection and analysis, we transcribed the interviews verbatim.

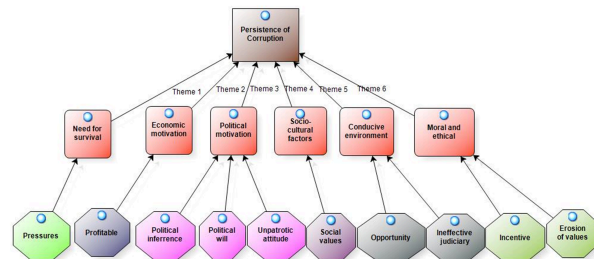
### 4. Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

In this section, we present the results of our findings. We analyzed our data using thematic analysis in line with (King & Horrocks, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2009) guidance for coding qualitative data. We followed the three levels of coding, specifically King & Horrocks' (2010) descriptive codes, interpretive codes, and overarching themes. We began by identifying any segment of our data that is responsive to our research purposes (Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2009) and then tagged it with an appropriate descriptive code (Saldana, 2009). The descriptive codes we generated were, in most instances, directly from our participants' words (in vivo coding). Where in vivo coding was not possible, we used suitable words external to the participants' account of the phenomenon (en vivo coding). We then clustered our descriptive codes in relation to the study's objectives to develop our interpretive codes. At this stage, we defined the codes beyond describing the relevant features of the participants' accounts (Saldana, 2009) of the phenomenon and concentrated more on the interpretation of their meanings. We proceeded with our interpretive codes to derive key emerging themes of the study. At a higher level of abstraction from the interpretive codes, we identified six overarching themes that characterized key concepts in our analysis. We arrived at the overarching themes by considering our interpretive themes from both theoretical and practical stances. We present the themes on why corruption occurs and persists in Nigeria as follows:

- i. Political motivation
- ii. Socio-cultural factors

- iii. Economic motivation
- iv. Moral and ethical issues
- v. Conducive environment
- vi. Need for survival

In Figure 0, we visualize the 6 themes and 10 subthemes that emerged from the study on the persistence of corruption in Nigeria to have a clearer picture of the entire process we followed.



**Figure 0.** Themes and subthemes on the persistence of corruption in Nigeria  
Source: Study findings

Three of the themes generated have one subtheme each, two of the themes have emanated from two subthemes each, while one theme has three subthemes. These themes have been developed from the rigorous comparison and iterative processes. Beginning with the within-case analysis, we moved forth and back across cases to identify recurring patterns in the data collected. Using the three levels of analysis, we identified the descriptive codes (first level) from our informants' accounts of the phenomenon, either directly picking the codes from their statements (nvivo coding) or using other suitable words to describe informants' accounts (envivo coding). Grouping our descriptive codes into clusters of relevant patterns of ideas expressed in the data, we arrived at our interpretive codes (second level). At this level, we tried to interpret our codes as categories within the data set. We defined our data beyond our participants' mere accounts and focused more on meaning. While doing this, we constantly referred to the interview scripts to clarify our thinking on the data. This we did throughout the stages. Finally, at a higher level of abstraction than the interpretive codes, our themes emerged as vividly depicted in Figure 0.

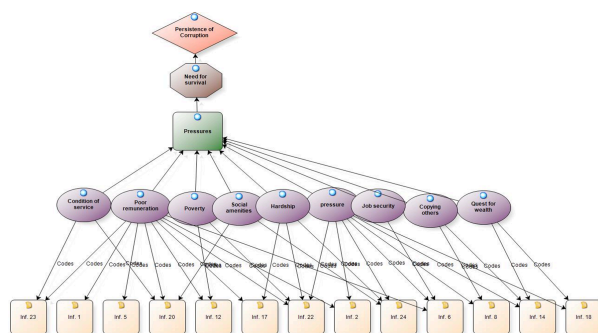
### *Theme One: Need for Survival*

One of the themes that emerged from this study attributes the occurrences and persistence of corruption to survival reasons. People get corrupted because they are often left with no other option than to be corrupt. In

other words, corruption thrives because of pressures that people wouldn't naturally succumb to. Even though we see no justification for corruption regardless of one's prevailing situation, we strongly believe that pressures are a strong precursor to corruption. As eloquently voiced by our participants, pressures stemming from poor remuneration, poverty, hardship, lack of job security, and poor conditions of service often push public office holders into corruption and other corrupt practices. Other motivators for corruption, as observed by the participants, include personal and family pressures, lack of functional social amenities, the quest for wealth, and emulation of others. Figure 1 presents theme one of the study, the subtheme, and the descriptive codes that emanated from the participants' accounts, as well as the participants who identify with each code. Out of a total of nine descriptive codes, 13 of the 24 participants have indicated some aspects of what constitutes pressures and subsequently the need for survival as factors contributing to the occurrence and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. With 9 of the 13 participants mentioning, as indicated by the arrows pointing inwards, the codes for poor remuneration and poor salaries are considered the major causes of pressure on public servants. This, according to the participants, creates an urge to satisfy one's needs at all costs, irrespective of the means, even if it involves corruption and other illegal means. The participants are particularly focused on this issue. For instance, participants 23, 20, and 17 have evidently captured this scenario in their accounts:

"People are not paid their due entitlements, and this and so many other factors make people corrupt. Poor remuneration, bad conditions of service even at retirement, people are not paid their dues. So, all these things make people corrupt" (Participant 23).

"Poor remuneration, when you look at the present situation in the country, the amount that an average civil servant is being paid cannot take care of his basic needs, not to mention his plans for the future, and you ask him not to be corrupt" (Participant 20).



**Figure 1.** Theme One: Need for Survival

Source: Research findings

“Every Nigerian, you know, and then we are talking about the public sector, the public office holders, people that hold public offices become so corrupt, and my first concern is about the government. When you look at the salaries of those people and the cost of living and the cost of everything in Nigeria, you see that the salary is not enough to maintain them, and this pushes people to acquire more” (Participant 17).

Therefore, it is obvious that when workers are not paid well, they may be under pressure to find other means to meet their needs in order to survive. So, this is a serious issue to be reckoned with in the identification of the occurrences and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. Closely related to poor remuneration, as voiced by the participants, are job security and bad conditions of service. Even though the frequency with which these two codes were mentioned is relatively low compared to poor remuneration, they still constitute significant factors causing pressure on public servants and thereby making them corrupt in their quest to find means to survive. Participant 6 voiced this concern that there is also a lack of security in the job one performs: “Poor remuneration, bad conditions of service even at retirement, people are not paid their dues. So, all these things make people be corrupt” (Participant 23). Other pressures, such as personal and family pressures, were equally identified in the participants’ accounts of the persistence of corruption in Nigeria.

“We also have pressure coming from all angles. The pressure for oneself living above his means or the inadequacy of the income being received as salaries and wages. Also, pressures emanating from the family members” (Participant 2).

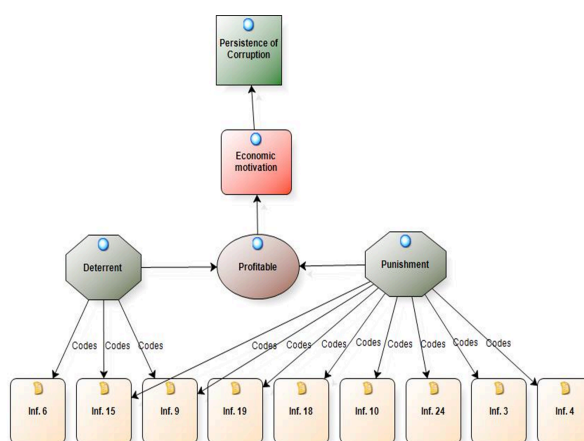
Trying to copy others, regardless of one’s status, and the quest for wealth at all costs create unnecessary pressure and subsequently push one towards corruption and corrupt practices. This is evidenced in the voices of Participants 8, 14, and 8, and corruption persists in Nigeria due to this duo. Other variables leading to PSC (persistence of corruption) in Nigeria include family pressure, lifestyle, and greed (Participant 8). In fact, Participants 14 and 18 are very emphatic on this point when they submit:

“People want to be like others, so they indulge in various activities to make sure that they get money, whether legally or illegally” (Participant 14).

“And then the next thing is that you see that the system does not really celebrate, that does not really celebrate merit, but attaches, ah, ah, significance to just wealth, not giving or taking into consideration how the wealth in question is amassed, you understand, is the system that upholds corruption” (Participant 18).

## Theme Two: Economic Motivation

Corruption in Nigeria thrives because many have considered it an economically viable venture and hence very profitable. In the first instance, they see its benefits outweighing the costs, as punishment for corruption is not enough to appropriately bring the culprits to justice. There is also the issue of a deterrent not being present or adequate to prevent the occurrences. Figure 2 visualizes this theme, the subtheme, as well as the two descriptive codes that eventually saw the emergence of the theme.



**Figure 2.** Theme Two: Economic Motivation

Source: Research findings

Participants' accounts indicate a sort of cost-benefit analysis between being corrupt and the consequences associated with the act. Thus, in the perception of the study participants, people get involved in corrupt practices because the acts come along with benefits to them. Deterrents are inadequate or virtually missing within the public-sector service in Nigeria. Equally, where the offense is committed, the punishment, if there is any, is insufficient compared to the magnitude of the gravity of the offense. Normally, public servants prefer to get involved in corrupt practices and in the end get away with a very light punishment. Essentially, in most instances, corruption and corrupt practices are not met with any punishment. This has made corruption thrive in Nigeria as a profitable endeavor that attracts a lot of investors from within and outside the public-sector service. Nine out of the 24 participants have identified these two factors among the causes of the persistence of corruption in Nigeria. Some of the participants have indicated the irony of the punishment for corruption in Nigeria. For instance, Participant 19 accounts for this in the following words:

“Penalties for crimes are not strict enough (pause). Someone steals billions of naira and he is supposed to pay back 700,000 naira; that is a joke” (laughed and then paused) (Participant 19).

Similarly, other participants see the lack of commitment to curtail corruption from the kind of punishment being associated with the act. Rather, in a way, it is encouraging corruption, as is being inferred from the voice of Participant 18:

“So, you discover that the provisions of the sections of the law that criminalize corruption, the kind of sanctions that they are awarded to, therein, you understand, are very, very, what you say, ridiculous compared to the magnitude of the offense. So, less stiffer sanctions, you understand, also make corruption very, very attractive, you understand” (Participant 18).

“Corruption has reached the level of endemic, that it has reached, [inaudible] gotten to this level of endemic that it has reached endemic because that there hasn't been previously any real punitive measure” (Participant 15).

“Punishment is not enough to deter the commission of corruption” (Participant 4).

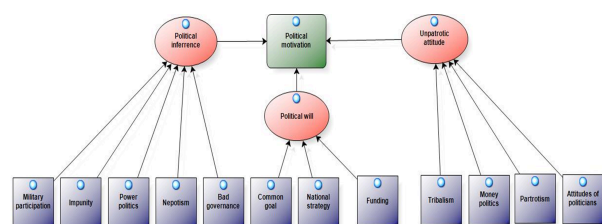
“Deterrent not enough to deter the commission of corrupt practices”

(Participant 6).

“Majority of the corruption cases in Nigeria go unpunished. This has greatly aided corruption in Nigeria” (Participant 10).

### Theme Three: Political Motivation

A major reason why corruption occurs and persists in Nigeria can be attributable to political motivation, as captured from the voices of our participants. A substantial part of the corruption in Nigeria is grand corruption. Unlike the survival observed under theme one, the grand corruption, as identified by the participants in this study, is politically motivated. Echoed in the voices of the participants, political interference, lack of political will, and unpatriotic attitudes of both the political players and public servants account for the politically motivated corruption in Nigeria. From the perspective of political interference, we see military incursion into politics greatly inducing the level of corruption in Nigeria. Other issues include the culture of nepotism and impunity in the political leadership of the country. These unnecessary interferences in politics and good governance often lead to the compromise of merit, allowing corruption to seep into the system. Above all, power politics has greatly characterized the Nigerian polity. Emerging from the lack of adequate funding for the anti-corruption fight and the absence of common goals and national strategies in the anti-corruption war, political will accounts for another aspect of politically motivated corruption in Nigeria. Similarly, the participants have indicated tribalism, lack of patriotism, and the politics of money as unpatriotic attitudes leading to politically motivated corruption in Nigeria. Figure 3 presents the association of politically motivated corruption with the subthemes and the descriptive codes derived from it.



**Figure 3.** Theme Three: Political Motivation  
Source: Research findings

Twelve descriptive codes derived from the participants' voices accounted for the three interpretive codes developed and the subsequent theme of political

motivation for the occurrence and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. Our participants have identified these aspects of political motivation causing corruption in Nigeria as depicted in Figure 3 above. According to participant 1; “The most important factor responsible for corruption is the introduction or the entrance of the military into Nigerian politics.”

“The role of politicians themselves has contributed to the persistence of corruption in Nigeria. Our politicians are selfish who...” (Participant 1).

“We had a long military dictatorship before the advent of the current democracy in 1999” (Participant 3).

“There is also the system of nepotism whereby appointments are based on whom you know and not on merit, leading to the employment of unqualified persons” (Participant 1).

“That is the question one should ask, and essentially, one of the major reasons is, of course, tribal sentiment” (Participant 13).

“And one of the biggest challenges, one of the reasons for corruption, is the culture of impunity. People believe that they can do whatever they want and get away with it as long as they know somebody. Another issue is the issue of power. How we play our politics here in Nigeria. Essentially, politics is supposed to be where people of integrity are found, but in Nigeria, the reverse is completely the case” (Participant 22).

“Another problem is the lack of funding. Recounting my experience as a prosecutor on a certain case, I was sent away to a state of the federation from Abuja and was not adequately funded. After the court proceedings, the accused, now a serving senator of the federation, came and passed me at the airport with his team of lawyers going back to Abuja on a chartered private

jet, while I was waiting for my flight” (Participant 3).

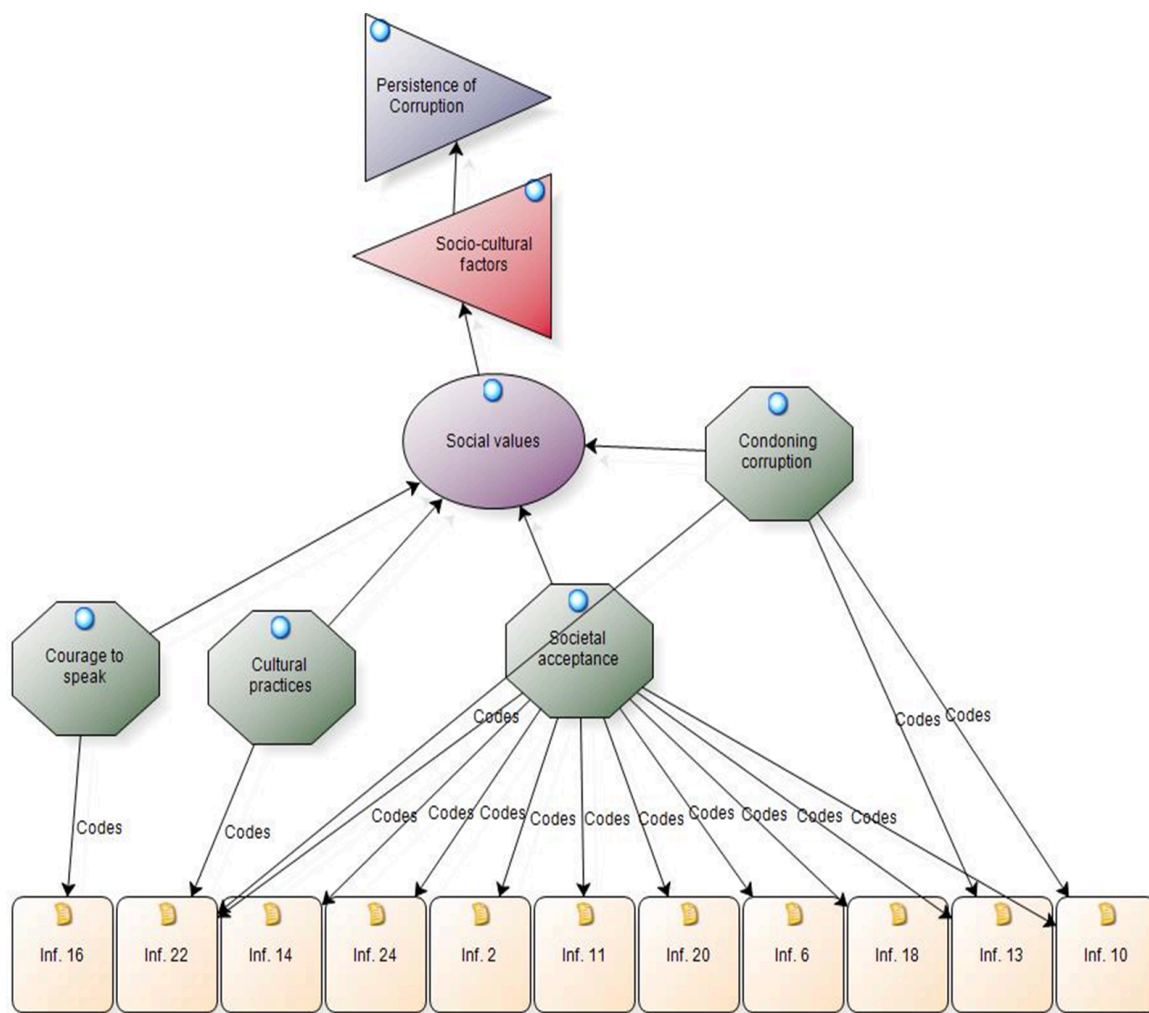
“Causes of corruption include but are not limited to a high level of poverty, a corrupt judiciary, lack of political will in fighting corruption, greed, poor funding of anti-corruption agencies, bad leadership, and a poor reward system, etc.” (Participant 12).

“What is happening is more or less like a discordant tune because there is no national strategy. So if there is no national strategy, that will not encourage synergy among all of the agencies that are responsible for combating corruption” (Participant 15).

“In fact, Nigerians don’t love Nigeria, Nigerians don’t have Nigeria at heart. They are not a people that have a common goal. They are just a different set of people that come together, that just happen to be living together. So there is no collective goal. So everybody is trying to get what they want to satisfy themselves. Everybody is like on their own, so there is no commitment to the cause called Nigeria, there is no patriotism, no vision. People don’t have vision; you will hear about the American dream. But in Nigeria, even children in school, they are taught about Nigeria; they don’t talk about Nigeria. They don’t know their heritage; they don’t know their country” (Participant 21).

#### *Theme Four: Socio-Cultural Factors*

The societal influence as well as the cultural affiliations have been identified by the participants as among the great precursors to corruption in Nigeria. Societal values are somehow missing, and certain cultural practices have been contributory factors fueling the level and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. Captured in the voices of our participants, Figure 4 presents theme four, detailing the socio-cultural factors given impetus to the persistence of corruption in Nigeria.



**Figure 4.** Theme Four: Socio-Cultural Factors  
Source: Research findings

Four descriptive codes, as shared by the participants' experiences, led to the emergence of socio-cultural factors as one of the major findings in this study. Eleven out of the 24 participants interviewed identified with one of the four aspects of the socio-cultural factors as responsible for the persistence of corruption in Nigeria. All but one of the eleven participants identified societal acceptance as a major reason for the persistence of corruption in Nigeria. Implicitly, corruption is gradually becoming the norm in Nigerian society as we see people now celebrating corruption and corrupt officers. As we conducted this study, a former governor in Nigeria returned from London after serving a jail term there on corruption charges. His kinsmen and other well-wishers went en masse to welcome him and celebrate his return.

On this note, two of our participants, who were interviewed just two days after his return, had this to say:

"Societal (paused) acceptance of corruption. I will give an example: someone came back from London yesterday or the day before yesterday, serving a jail time in London, and people welcomed him with drums, with, you know, with protests and everything just to celebrate his return from prison for being corrupt. I don't know which kind of society that, you know, encourages other people to be corrupt" (Participant 20).

"Another issue is the society, the society itself. How does the society look at you if you are a man of integrity? We have a culture that, um, kind, um, respects people who have made money, no matter how they did it. A recent case is the case of James Ibori who arrived in Nigeria. What happened, you can see. Even though he was convicted and he had served a term in the UK, when he returned to Nigeria, his people came out overwhelmingly to receive him. So, this says what, it is okay to steal. Just steal as much as you can and share as little as possible with people; they will be okay" (Participant 22).

Apparently, society no longer frowns at corruption and corrupt public officers. So long as one has amassed wealth in whatever means and capacity, he is revered and dignified. Participants 14 and 24 further commented on this:

"...and then because of the nature of our society, people tend to worship money" (Participant 14).

"Since if there are no proper checks and balances and there is no sanction for someone doing wrongdoing, and the other parties celebrate those that have gotten illegal wealth at the detriment of the government, so from that point, I think there is something that needs to be controlled and checked" (Participant 24).

Related to societal acceptance of corruption, people tend to condone the act even when not involved and believe that corruption is an anti-social behavior. For instance, participant 22 expresses this in his words:

"Because even if we don't actively participate in it, we have learned to live with it, you understand. Seeing corruption, condoning corruption, that too is part of corruption. Now, the biggest challenge is that even those who do not partake in it are afraid of the consequences of corruption fighting back. So, when they see it, they just pretend as if it doesn't happen or that it doesn't concern them" (Participant 22).

Other aspects of socio-cultural factors imminent in the voices of the participants include a lack of courage to speak the truth and cultural practices. These are views captured by participants 16 and 22 and are appropriately

considered due to their significance and uniqueness to the phenomenon of the study.

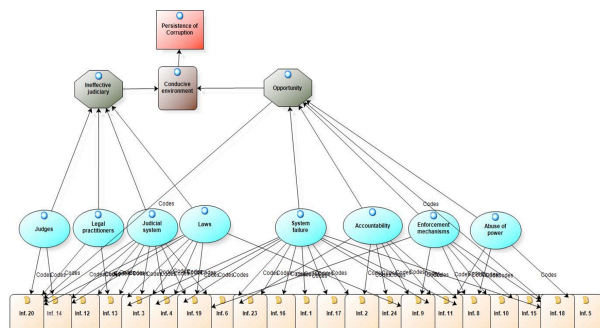
"That's one thing I find lacking in our society, we are not bold enough or courageous to speak the truth" (Participant 16).

"No matter how hard you try, you know, to live within one's legal income, it is seriously an impossible task. One has to pay rent, one has to send children to school, and with our culture of dependence, extended family, it is really, really a tall order for someone who has integrity. It takes only the fear of God" (Participant 22).

### *Theme Five: Conducive Environment*

Corruption occurs in an environment that is friendly to such activities. The absence of accountability and checks and balances in a system provides an opportunity that ultimately allows for a veritable environment for corruption to crop up and grow steadily. Participants' views in this study indicate loopholes in the Nigerian public sector, abuse of processes in the system, and a lack of proper accountability that constitute the opportunity for creating a conducive environment for corruption to thrive in Nigeria. Similarly, an ineffective judiciary, in the form of deficiencies in the laws and issues with the judges, also creates a conducive environment for corruption to thrive in Nigeria. In Figure 5, we visualize this association, depicting theme five of this study. Twenty-one out of the 24 total participants have identified an aspect of a conducive environment as causing the persistence of corruption in Nigeria. In fact, this indicates the relevance of this theme in explaining the occurrence and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. These participants are highly experienced in the investigative aspects of public sector corruption, and they have been in contact with corrupt public servants as investigators and prosecutors of corruption under the umbrella of the anti-corruption bodies in Nigeria for a long time. Hence, recounting their worldviews and experiences on the phenomenon of the study certainly provides a better understanding of the phenomenon. Opportunity accounts for the highest mover of corruption, as has been derived from the voices of the participants. In this sense, opportunity provides the basis for a conducive environment that allows corruption to take effect. Equally observed is the lack of enforcement mechanisms in the public sector. Participants in this study have voiced their views on the persistence of corruption that, in part, is due to the non-enforcement of mechanisms to checkmate the menace. In some instances, the mechanisms are completely missing, while

in other situations, they only exist on paper, not in reality. Other issues that the participants revealed on the persistence of corruption are problems in the system and abuse of power. The structure of the federal public service has been faulted by many. The participants perceive the system to contain so many loopholes that stand out to promote the culture of corruption.



**Figure 5.** Theme Five: Conducive Environment  
Source: Research findings

Figure 5 reveals the descriptive and interpretive codes that led to the emergence of theme five in this study, which is a conducive environment. An ineffective judiciary and opportunity have been identified as constituting a conducive environment for corruption to occur and persist over the years. Evidenced in the voices of the participants, a faulty judicial system, inadequacy of the laws, and the problems often created by judges and lawyers, as well as the opportunities existing in the system, provide a conducive environment for corruption to thrive in Nigeria. In his strong voice, Participant 20 has earnestly addressed these two aspects of a conducive environment for corruption.

“This point is VERY, VERY IMPORTANT. I want you to EMPHASIZE it in your report. You are in a situation where the JUSTICE SYSTEM, our JUDICIAL SYSTEM, does not even on its own discourage corruption. Corruption is a crime; I believe even in law, the law criminalizes it. But when you go to court after being accused, the investigator has investigated you and everything, some sections of our judicial system can be exploited to your own favor” (Participant 20).

“Without the good opportunity, the corrupt to a very good extent, that if we have money to take care of the judge, take care of the lawyer, and at the end of the day, what

you get by the time you subtract that one, you still have enough for yourself. Due to the loophole in our judicial system, please, I want you to EMPHASIZE this point very well” (Participant 20).

Similarly, other aspects have echoed in the voices of the participants in the study. Excerpts from the interview transcripts indicate that the majority of the participants align with certain issues related to a conducive environment as responsible for corruption. The following quotes represent some of the participants’ worldviews:

“There is a delay in judgment; for example, some corruption cases last for more than ten years without judgment being passed. Oftentimes, access to the cases is being lost. Hence, the law is not fast enough to guarantee the sanctioning of the offenders” (Participant 3).

“There are delays in the court proceedings related to corruption, which obviously is not a good deterrent for corruption” (Participant 3).

“Whereby looking at how people in authority squander the public treasury without proper accountability” (Participant 2).

“It has become an issue that the quest is for everyone now to get his share in the system and therefore not to be left out (laughed)” (Participant 2).

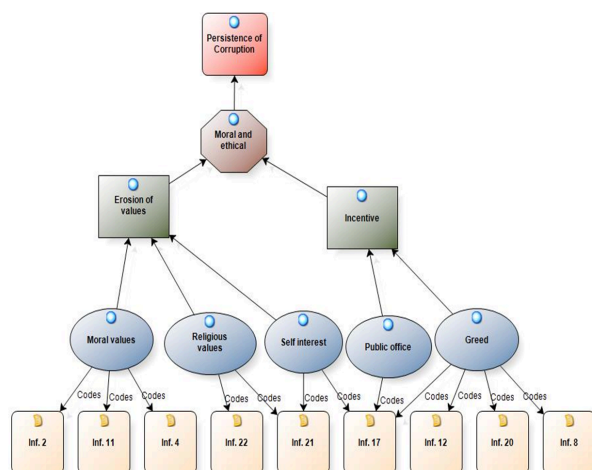
“Most of those involved in corruption are just opportune; it’s just a question of opportunity. Normally, those in strategic government positions that enable them to put into their personal pockets what belongs to the government” (Participant 5).

“The federal system is not working, and it is lopsided, whereby everyone is trying to get or grab something” (Participant 1).

### Theme Six: Moral and Ethical Issues

Another emerging theme established in this study is that the occurrence and persistence of corruption are due to moral and ethical deprivation in Nigeria. The finding reveals that the erosion of moral values and unethical behaviors culminates in corrupt practices. Equally, established are the issues relating to religious values. If properly adhered to, religious principles will guard against the occurrence of corruption and corrupt practices, let alone its persistence. However, as established in this study, despite the claims by the

majority of Nigerians to be deeply ingrained in religious practices, that has not deterred the commission of corruption in Nigeria. Figure 6 depicts theme six of this study and the associations it subsumes.



**Figure 6.** Theme Six: Moral and Ethical Issues  
Source: Research findings

Moral values, religious values, self-interest, public office as a means of getting rich, and greed account for the two factors that constitute the moral/ethical causes of corruption. According to the participants, the erosion of moral values and inner incentives are among the major reasons why corruption takes place in Nigeria. The public servants who are supposed to be custodians of the public service fall into betraying that trust and get indulged in corrupt practices, having been deprived of moral values. Lack of moral values, religious values, and the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of the state demonstrate moral values issues leading to corruption on moral and ethical grounds. When public office is regarded as a means to getting rich, and if there is greed in one, a strong motivation for corruption is imminent. As evidenced from the voices of 9 out of the 24 participants, moral and ethical factors also account for the occurrence and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. Evident in the voices of the participants, greed and lack of moral values are major reasons causing corruption under the moral and ethical considerations.

“People have different reasons, but if you ask me, I will say greed, you know. When someone is greedy, someone says there is something to meet our needs, but there is nothing to satisfy our greed. Greed is one” (Participant 20).

“But in Nigeria, we don’t have true religion, we don’t have an issue with religion, only outward piety where someone only claims that he is a man of God” (Participant 21).

“So, such is our state, such is, you find out that even though Nigeria claims to be the most religious country in the world, you find out that every Nigerian claims to adhere to one faith or the other, but if you look at the way we act it does not; corruption is like our second, first religion” (Participant 22).

“So everybody is trying to get what they want to satisfy themselves. Everybody is like on their own, so there is no commitment to the course called Nigeria, there is no patriotism” (Participant 21).

“But all what the public servants, public sector holders are looking at is me first. So, I see it as greed, greed really contributes to that. I see it that, people see it if I get into that particular position, if I can, can hold this particular office that is the way of getting wealth, as is so easy. They are not, they are not thinking, public holders are not thinking about how to put their best in their jobs, how to ensure, ensure that what they were assigned to do they have done accordingly” (Participant 17).

## Conclusion

In trying to understand the causes and persistence of corruption in Nigeria, we interviewed 24 experts from the Nigerian anti-corruption agencies. Six themes have emerged as the findings from the study. We limited the use of literature in this study to give room for discoveries of new concepts from the perspectives and understanding of our participants. We believe that participants are experts and have the requisite experiences and understanding in anti-corruption and in relation to the corrupt officers.

Further research can revisit these themes and compare them with other findings in the existing literature. Additionally, the participants can be expanded to include other stakeholders on corruption such as academics, non-governmental organizations, professional accountants, legal practitioners, and the media. The concepts developed from this study can be tested through quantitative research.

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