

A NEW TAXONOMY FOR CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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Corruption is the single greatest obstacle preventing Nigeria from achieving its enormous potential. It drains billions of dollars a year from the country's economy, stymies development, and weakens the social contract between the government and its people. Nigerians view their country as one of the world's most corrupt and struggle daily to cope with the effects. Yet few analytical tools exist for examining the full range and complexity of corruption in Africa's largest economy and most populous country. This paper proposes a new, context-specific framework for understanding a problem that will remain a focus of international and domestic Nigerian policy discussions for decades to come.

The Remarkable Reach of Nigerian Corruption

- The scope and complexity of corruption in Nigeria is immense. This taxonomy details twenty overarching contexts (sectors) that are especially vulnerable to corruption. It also identifies twenty-eight corruption tactics in eight behavioral categories that cut across each of these sectors. These categories apply not only to national-level dynamics but also to corruption at the state and local levels.
- Some types of corruption (for example, extortion or contract fraud) are more prevalent in some sectors than in others. Likewise, some are more or less damaging—either directly or via negative multiplier effects—depending on where they occur. This taxonomy acknowledges that corruption in Nigeria is not always clear-cut or limited in focus, but rather it is interconnected, involving a range of behaviors that cleave across sectors.
- In Nigeria's political and institutional sectors, electoral corruption and kleptocratic capture of political party structures unlock corruption opportunities across a range of other sectors. Brown envelope journalism and other types of media corruption are commonly practiced and undermine democratic norms. Meanwhile, the symbiotic relationship between legislative and bureaucratic corruption, embodied by white elephants like Nigeria's three space agencies, influences a disproportionate share of government expenditures.
- Corruption is rife across the country's economic sectors: petroleum, trade, industrial, agricultural, infrastructure, power sector, banking, and environmental. Together, these forms of corruption erase billions of dollars from Nigeria's bottom line and prevent it from realizing its great human and economic potential.
- In Nigeria's security sectors, defense sector and police corruption are destabilizing and compounding security challenges in conflict hotspots like the Lake Chad Basin, the Middle Belt, and the Niger Delta. Corruption in the judiciary and within anticorruption agencies undermines the country's already anemic accountability mechanisms, thereby fueling corruption across the spectrum.
- Educational, health, and humanitarian sector corruption, meanwhile, saps the country's social capital and has an outsized impact on its most vulnerable citizens. This corruption also negates international development assistance and emergency aid, particularly in northeast Nigeria, where—in one of the world's largest humanitarian crises—over 2 million people have been displaced by the Boko Haram conflict.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Key Uses of the Corruption Taxonomy

This taxonomy of corruption in Nigeria is of potential utility for several audiences. It can help national-level policymakers more effectively navigate Nigeria's complex and interconnected corruption landscape. It also provides a framework for mapping prospective policy initiatives and gauging the impact of bilateral engagements on corruption and governance issues.

Adopting this taxonomy would make it more difficult for policymakers to treat corruption in Nigeria as a standalone issue. Instead, they would need to treat it as one that is intertwined with their democracy, security, and socioeconomic development goals.

For international partners, diplomats, and Nigerian civil society groups engaged in anticorruption work, this framework also offers a more contextualized basis for conducting programmatic assessments and analyzing the relative prevalence, impact, and multiplier effects of different forms of corruption in Nigeria.

Tailored to Nigerian realities, this taxonomy supports the World Bank's push to "do development differently" by forging more context-specific approaches to addressing development challenges like corruption.

As an analytical tool, this taxonomy would be useful to corruption researchers looking to compare the situation in Nigeria—one of the world's most complex corruption environments—with conditions in other countries. Though Nigeria-specific, it could be adapted and applied to other country cases.

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