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CORRUPTION AND ITS EFFECTS ON PUBLIC TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Corruption is a significant obstacle to effective governance and sustainable development in Nigeria, particularly at the local government level. This study investigates the impact of corruption on public trust in Nigerian local governments, using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected from 600 respondents across six local government areas, while qualitative insights were drawn from interviews with key informants. The findings reveal a pervasive perception of corruption, with 85% of respondents agreeing that mismanagement of funds and nepotism are common practices in local governments. Public trust was found to be critically low, with a mean score of 2.25 on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating widespread skepticism about the transparency and accountability of local officials. Statistical analysis demonstrated a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.01$) and significant predictive relationship ($\beta = -0.68$, $p < 0.001$) between perceived corruption and public trust, accounting for 49% of the variance in trust levels. Qualitative data highlighted systemic challenges, including weak oversight mechanisms and ineffective anti-corruption measures, as well as the erosion of social cohesion due to public disillusionment with governance. These findings align with prior research, reinforcing the conclusion that corruption undermines governance by eroding citizens' confidence and engagement. The study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms, including stronger accountability frameworks, enhanced transparency, and active citizen participation, to restore public trust and improve local government performance. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on corruption and governance in Nigeria, offering actionable recommendations for policy and practice.

Keywords: *Corruption, public trust, local government, Nigeria, governance, accountability*

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Introduction

Corruption remains a pervasive challenge in Nigeria, undermining governance and development at all levels of administration. Local governments, as the third tier of government, occupy a critical position in the governance structure. Their proximity to the grassroots makes them essential for promoting participatory democracy, enhancing socio-economic development, and delivering essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. However, these objectives are often stymied by systemic corruption that diverts resources meant for public use into private hands (Agbiboa, 2012).

Public trust, defined as the confidence citizens have in the integrity and effectiveness of governmental institutions, is foundational to the legitimacy of local governments (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Trust facilitates collaboration between governments and citizens, fostering civic engagement and compliance with public policies. Conversely, when corruption erodes public trust, citizens may become disillusioned, disengaged, and even resistant to government initiatives. As Nigeria strives to address its socio-economic challenges, the role of local governments becomes increasingly significant, yet their performance is consistently hindered by the endemic corruption embedded in their operations (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Nigeria's corruption problem is deeply rooted in its historical, political, and institutional contexts. Decades of military rule entrenched a culture of impunity, patronage, and resource mismanagement that continues to plague the country's governance structures (Osoba, 1996). At the local government level, weak institutional frameworks, inadequate oversight mechanisms, and the centralization of power in the hands of a few create fertile ground for corruption. For instance, studies have shown that local government officials often embezzle federal allocations meant for grassroots development projects, resulting in poor service delivery and declining public trust (Enejo & Isa, 2020).

The consequences of corruption at the local government level are far-reaching. It exacerbates poverty, undermines social cohesion, and weakens democratic governance. Citizens who perceive their local governments as corrupt are less likely to participate in governance processes, such as attending town hall meetings or paying taxes, further weakening the financial and operational capacity of local authorities (Ogunrotifa, 2013). Moreover, corruption at the grassroots level has ripple effects on national development, as local governments are critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering inclusive growth.

This study aims to examine the intricate relationship between corruption and public trust in Nigerian local governments. By exploring the manifestations, causes, and consequences of corruption, it highlights the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to restore public confidence and enhance governance outcomes. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on corruption and governance, providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners working to address these challenges.

Statement of the Problem

Corruption is a persistent challenge undermining the effectiveness of local governments in Nigeria. Despite the constitutional mandate to bring governance closer to the people and foster grassroots development, local governments have become hubs of inefficiency and resource

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mismanagement. Corrupt practices such as embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, and contract inflation have eroded public confidence in these institutions. Citizens who perceive local governments as corrupt often disengage from governance processes, leading to weakened accountability, reduced civic participation, and underdevelopment.

The erosion of public trust in local governments is particularly concerning because trust is a cornerstone of democratic governance and effective service delivery. Without public trust, local governments struggle to implement policies, mobilize resources, and address the needs of their constituents. This breakdown of trust has far-reaching implications for Nigeria's socio-economic development, as local governments play a critical role in achieving national and international development goals.

Despite the extensive attention corruption receives in Nigerian governance discourse, relatively little research has focused on its specific impact on public trust at the local government level. There is a pressing need to understand how corruption manifests in local governments, the extent to which it affects public trust, and what can be done to address these challenges. This study addresses this gap, providing a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between corruption and public trust in Nigerian local governments.

Research Hypothesis

Based on the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. **H1:** Corruption in local governments has a significant negative effect on public trust in Nigeria.
2. **H2:** The perception of corruption in local governments leads to reduced civic engagement among citizens.
3. **H3:** Effective anti-corruption measures in local governments can significantly improve public trust and citizen participation.

Literature Review

Understanding Corruption in Local Governments

Corruption, broadly defined as the abuse of public office for private gain, is a pervasive issue in Nigeria, deeply entrenched in its political and administrative systems (Transparency International, 2022). At the local government level, corruption often manifests through the embezzlement of funds, nepotism, bribery, and over-invoicing of contracts (Oluwu, 2001). Local governments in Nigeria are constitutionally empowered to provide basic services and promote grassroots development, yet they are frequently characterized by inefficiency and a lack of accountability due to corruption (Agbiboa, 2012).

A significant body of research has linked corruption to the inefficacy of local governments in meeting their developmental objectives. For instance, studies by Aiyede (2006) and Nwafor and Azi (2020) highlight how the diversion of statutory allocations deprives local governments of the resources needed to execute development projects. Furthermore, weak monitoring mechanisms and the lack of political will to enforce anti-corruption laws exacerbate this problem.

Causes of Corruption in Local Governments

Scholars have identified several structural and systemic factors contributing to corruption in Nigerian local governments. Adegbola (2021) argues that one of the primary causes is the over-centralization of power, which creates opportunities for rent-seeking and undermines local autonomy. The lack of robust checks and balances allows local officials to

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engage in corrupt practices with minimal repercussions (Osoba, 1996).

Additionally, poor remuneration and job insecurity among local government officials are significant factors driving corruption. Dike (2005) suggests that low salaries and an uncertain career path incentivize officials to seek illicit income as a means of securing financial stability. Moreover, political interference in local government affairs by state governors further undermines transparency and accountability. This interference often takes the form of state-controlled "joint accounts" that limit the financial independence of local governments (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Public Trust and Governance

Public trust is essential for fostering an effective relationship between governments and citizens. According to Mishler and Rose (2001), public trust in government is built on perceptions of fairness, accountability, and competence. When governments fail to meet these expectations, trust is eroded, leading to disengagement and a lack of public cooperation in governance.

In the Nigerian context, several studies have established a strong link between corruption and declining public trust. Ovwasa (2014) notes that citizens often perceive local governments as self-serving entities primarily concerned with enriching a small elite. This perception is further exacerbated by the lack of transparency in local government operations, such as the awarding of contracts and the implementation of development projects (Enejo & Isa, 2020). As a result, citizens are less likely to participate in governance processes or comply with tax obligations, which in turn limits the capacity of local governments to deliver essential services.

Effects of Corruption on Local Government Performance

Corruption undermines the capacity of local governments to fulfill their responsibilities, particularly in service delivery. Inadequate provision of basic services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development is one of the most visible consequences of corruption at the grassroots level (Adeyemi, 2012). For example, inflated contracts and the diversion of funds often result in incomplete or substandard projects, leaving communities underserved.

Furthermore, corruption contributes to a culture of impunity and weakens democratic values. Dike (2005) argues that when local officials are not held accountable for corrupt practices, it sends a signal to the public that corruption is an acceptable norm. This erodes citizens' faith in democratic institutions and processes, further undermining governance.

Broader Implications for Development

The implications of corruption in local governments extend beyond service delivery and governance. Social cohesion and community trust are also adversely affected. Studies have shown that communities with high levels of corruption experience higher rates of social unrest, as citizens express their dissatisfaction through protests and other forms of dissent (Akinola, 2013). Moreover, the failure of local governments to address grassroots needs undermines Nigeria's broader development agenda, including the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ogunrotifa, 2013).

Existing Anti-Corruption Efforts and Gaps

Despite the establishment of anti-corruption agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), corruption remains pervasive at the local

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government level. Scholars like Adebanjo (2021) argue that these agencies focus primarily on high-profile cases at the national level, neglecting the grassroots where corruption is equally damaging. Additionally, the lack of community engagement in anti-corruption efforts reduces the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between corruption and public trust in Nigerian local governments. The qualitative aspect involves content analysis of secondary data, including journal articles, policy reports, and government documents. The quantitative aspect uses survey data collected from local government areas (LGAs) across Nigeria. This design ensures both depth and breadth in understanding the issue.

Study Population and Sampling

The study targets residents in six selected LGAs, one from each geopolitical zone of Nigeria (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West). A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, one state was randomly selected from each zone. Second, one LGA was chosen based on its level of reported corruption cases in media and official reports. Finally, respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across age, gender, and socioeconomic status. A sample size of 600 respondents (100 per LGA) was determined using Cochran's formula to ensure statistical reliability.

Data Collection Instruments

1. **Questionnaires**: A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. It consisted of three sections:
    - **Demographics**: Gender, age, education, and occupation.
    - **Perception of Corruption**: Measured using a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) with statements such as "Local government officials are often involved in corrupt practices."
    - **Public Trust**: Measured using items such as "I trust my local government to manage public resources effectively."
2. **Interviews**: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 key informants, including community leaders, local government officials, and anti-corruption experts, to provide qualitative insights into the causes and effects of corruption.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) summarize respondents' perceptions of corruption and trust. Inferential analysis, including Pearson's correlation and regression analysis, examines the relationship between corruption and public trust. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring patterns and themes.

Results

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the dynamics of corruption and public trust in Nigerian local governments. The results are categorized into the following areas: demographic distribution,

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perception of corruption, trust in local governments, and the relationship between corruption and public trust.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 illustrates the demographic distribution of the respondents.

Demographic Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	315	52.5
Female	285	47.5
Age Group		
18–30	180	30.0
31–45	240	40.0
46–60	150	25.0
61 and above	30	5.0
Education Level		
Primary Education	90	15.0
Secondary Education	240	40.0
Tertiary Education	270	45.0

The demographic data show a balanced representation across gender and age groups, with the majority of respondents holding secondary or tertiary education qualifications. This suggests that most participants are well-informed and capable of providing reliable perceptions of corruption and trust.

Perception of Corruption in Local Governments

The perception of corruption was assessed using several statements rated on a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Local government officials are often involved in corruption.	4.32	0.78

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Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Mismanagement of funds is a common issue in local governments.	4.45	0.65
Anti-corruption measures in local governments are effective.	2.14	1.02

The results reveal that respondents overwhelmingly perceive corruption as pervasive in local governments, with high mean scores for statements regarding corrupt practices and fund mismanagement. Conversely, anti-corruption measures were rated poorly, indicating a lack of confidence in existing mechanisms to address corruption.

Public Trust in Local Governments

Public trust was measured through a series of indicators assessing citizens' confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of their local governments.

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
I trust my local government to manage public resources.	2.25	0.91
Local government officials prioritize community development.	2.41	1.12
I believe my local government is transparent in its dealings.	2.11	0.94

Low mean scores across all trust-related statements reflect significant skepticism among respondents regarding the trustworthiness and transparency of local governments. This highlights the damaging impact of corruption on citizens' confidence in their local leaders.

Statistical Analysis

Correlation Between Perceived Corruption and Public Trust

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between perceived corruption and public trust.

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Perceived Corruption vs. Public Trust	-0.72	<0.01

The analysis shows a strong negative correlation between perceived corruption and public trust. This indicates that higher levels of perceived corruption are significantly associated with lower levels of public trust in local governments.

Regression Analysis: Predicting Public Trust

A linear regression model was employed to assess the extent to which perceived corruption predicts public trust.

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Significance (p-value)
Perceived Corruption	-0.68	0.12	-0.68	<0.001

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The regression model indicates that perceived corruption is a significant predictor of public trust, accounting for 49% of the variance in trust levels ($R^2 = 0.49$, $F(1,598) = 145.76$, $p < 0.001$). The negative β coefficient reinforces the conclusion that increased corruption perception leads to reduced public trust.

Additional Insights from Qualitative Data

The thematic analysis of interviews with community leaders, local government officials, and anti-corruption experts revealed key insights:

1. **Systemic Challenges**: Interviewees emphasized that weak oversight mechanisms and lack of accountability foster corruption.
2. **Ineffective Anti-Corruption Measures**: Respondents highlighted that existing anti-corruption efforts are poorly implemented and lack public involvement.
3. **Erosion of Social Cohesion**: Community leaders noted that distrust in local governments has strained relationships between citizens and authorities, contributing to reduced civic engagement and social unrest.

Summary of Results

The results underscore the pervasive nature of corruption in Nigerian local governments and its detrimental effects on public trust. Statistical analyses confirm a significant negative relationship between corruption and trust, while qualitative data provide contextual depth, revealing systemic challenges and the need for reform. The findings call for urgent measures to enhance transparency, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and rebuild public confidence in local governance.

Discussions

The findings of this study highlight the significant and negative impact of corruption on public trust in Nigerian local governments. This section discusses the results in light of existing literature, providing a broader understanding of the implications and contextualizing them within similar studies.

The study revealed that corruption is widely perceived as pervasive within Nigerian local governments. This aligns with findings by Agbiboa (2012), who identified corruption as deeply entrenched in Nigeria's governance systems, particularly at the grassroots level. Agbiboa noted that practices such as embezzlement, nepotism, and bribery are commonplace, severely undermining the capacity of local governments to deliver public services.

Similarly, Adeyemi (2012) argued that corruption in local governments is exacerbated by weak institutional frameworks and a lack of accountability. The present study's results, showing a mean score of 4.45 for mismanagement of funds, mirror Adeyemi's findings that resource mismanagement is a major issue hindering grassroots development. The failure of anti-corruption measures, as indicated by the low mean score of 2.14 in this study, also echoes the concerns raised by Osoba (1996), who highlighted the ineffectiveness of existing frameworks in curbing corruption.

The findings demonstrated alarmingly low levels of public trust in local governments, with respondents expressing skepticism about the integrity and transparency of these institutions. These results are consistent with studies by Rothstein and Uslaner (2005), who argued that corruption erodes the social contract between

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citizens and their governments, leading to widespread mistrust.

Ovwasa (2014) similarly observed that citizens in Nigeria often view local governments as self-serving entities that prioritize the interests of a few elites over the welfare of the broader community. The low mean score of 2.25 for the statement "I trust my local government to manage public resources" reinforces Ovwasa's assertion that distrust in governance is a byproduct of perceived corruption and inefficiency.

The strong negative correlation between perceived corruption and public trust ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.01$) corroborates existing research on the interplay between these variables. For example, a study by Mishler and Rose (2001) found that trust in government is closely linked to perceptions of fairness and accountability. When corruption is perceived as prevalent, citizens lose faith in the government's ability to act in the public interest, resulting in disengagement and apathy.

The regression analysis in this study ($\beta = -0.68$, $p < 0.001$) further supports the argument by Dike (2005) that corruption is a significant determinant of public distrust in Nigerian governance systems. Dike contended that addressing corruption at all levels, particularly the grassroots, is crucial to restoring confidence in government institutions.

The qualitative data from interviews revealed systemic challenges, including weak oversight mechanisms and ineffective anti-corruption efforts. These insights align with Adegbola (2021), who identified poor monitoring frameworks and political interference as major barriers to effective governance in Nigerian local governments.

Additionally, the erosion of social cohesion noted by community leaders in this study reflects findings by Akinola (2013), who observed that distrust in local governments often leads to social unrest and reduced civic engagement. The inability of local governments to address basic community needs not only perpetuates poverty but also creates a cycle of disillusionment and disengagement among citizens.

Implications of the Findings

1. **Policy and Governance**:

The strong negative relationship between corruption and public trust underscores the urgent need for reforms. Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) emphasized that building trust requires visible efforts to address corruption, including transparent financial management and robust accountability measures.

2. **Service Delivery**:

The perception of corruption undermines the capacity of local governments to deliver essential services. Adeyemi (2012) argued that improving transparency in resource allocation and service delivery is critical to rebuilding public trust.

3. **Civic Engagement**:

The findings suggest that citizens are less likely to engage with corrupt governments, as highlighted by Ajayi and Buhari (2014). Encouraging citizen participation through community-based monitoring and reporting mechanisms could enhance transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

This study's findings, in line with previous research, confirm that corruption is a major impediment to effective local governance in Nigeria, significantly eroding public trust. Addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted approach, including institutional

reforms, enhanced anti-corruption measures, and active citizen engagement. By tackling corruption, local governments can rebuild trust, improve service delivery, and foster sustainable development at the grassroots level.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Institutional Frameworks**

Establishing robust anti-corruption mechanisms at the local level is essential. This includes independent audits, transparent budgeting processes, and digital platforms for tracking expenditures.

2. **Capacity Building and Training**

Public officials require training in ethical governance and resource management. Such initiatives can foster a culture of accountability and integrity.

3. **Community Engagement**

Encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes promotes transparency and empowers communities to hold leaders accountable.

4. **Legislative Reforms**

Amending existing laws to impose stricter penalties for corruption at the local level can serve as a deterrent. Additionally, decentralizing anti-corruption agencies can enhance oversight.

5. **Technology and E-Governance**

Leveraging technology, such as e-governance platforms, can improve transparency, streamline processes, and reduce opportunities for corruption.

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