

ASSESSMENT OF WHISTLE BLOWER POLICY OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ON CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study assessed the whistle blower policy of the Federal Government on corruption in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to: examine the effectiveness of the whistle blower policy of the Federal Government in mitigating the misappropriation of public funds among public office holders in Nigeria, evaluate the effectiveness of the whistle blower policy of the Federal Government in reducing violation of public procurement procedures among public office holders in Nigeria and investigate the effectiveness of the whistle blower policy of the Federal Government in eliminating bribery collection among public office holders in Nigeria. The study employed a systematic review methodology for the study. The result showed that whistle blower policy of the Federal Government has relationship with the mitigation of public funds misappropriation among public office holders, reduction in the violation of public procurement procedures among public office holders and reduction in eliminating bribery collection among public office holders in Nigeria. It was recommended that special courts should be established to try corruption cases. This will give speed and quick judgment to corruption cases.

KEYWORDS: Corruption, Organisation, Poverty, Weak institutions, Whistle blower,

Introduction

According to all metrics, corruption is the most pressing issue facing the contemporary Nigerian government. Corruption, which has been rightly characterised as the gravest kind of human violation, is seen to be largely to blame for the decay that affects all levels of Nigerian society. Corruption has been a problem in Nigerian government since independence, under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafa Belewa, and continues to this day under President Bola Tinubu. Worldwide, people are still talking about how rotten the country is. Once again, Nigeria has been placed low in the 2024 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) by the global anti-corruption monitor, Transparency International (TI). According to the most recent rating, Nigeria is positioned 140th out of 180 countries (Oigiangbe, 2025). Money laundering, advance fee fraud, and related offences acts of 1995, failed banks (recovery of debts and financial malpractices in banks act 1994), banks and other financial institution act 1991, miscellaneous offences acts 1995, Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) Acts, and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Acts are among the statutes that make corruption a punishable offence in Nigeria. Thousands of tips were received within the first six months of the Nigerian Whistle Blowing

Policy's official launch by the Federal Ministry of Finance on December 22, 2016, according to Taiwo (2015). These tips resulted in the opening of more than three thousand investigations and the recovery of several billions of naira, according to the report. Nevertheless, controversy has persisted around the conceptual, ethical, and implementation frameworks of the policy thus far, even though Buhari's minister of information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, has praised the policy's successes in various forums as proof of the war against corruption's progress. Given the uniqueness of the policy and the peculiarities of the Nigerian case, it's easy to see how whistleblowers' concerns about safety would play a significant role in their decision to disclose wrongdoing.

In many parts of the world, whistle blowing has been used as a tool to combat corruption. According to Onodugo (2015), whistle blowing is when employees, whether current or former, reveal to those who can take action any unlawful, immoral, or illegitimate practices that their employers are involved with. The truth is that either an internal or external source can blow the whistle. Whistle blowing is considered internal if it involves reporting misconduct to parties within the organisation. Whistle blowing is deemed external if the misconduct is divulged to those people outside the organisation. Unless corruption is identified, reported, and either penalised or handled, it will not be possible to combat it. The battle against corruption, like the fight against any other crime, must, nevertheless, adhere to the principles of due process. One of the biggest obstacles that Nigeria must overcome in her battle against corruption is the obvious: finding and prosecuting corrupt individuals. That is why blowing the whistle is a great approach to uncover corruption in its most obvious forms.

The federal government paid 20 whistleblowers a staggering N375.8 million in the first half of the policy, which resulted to the recovery of almost N11.6 billion. This might be the answer, as pointed out by Adetula and Amupitan (2018). There will likely be a dramatic uptick in responses to the request for information on stolen funds in the coming months as a result of that one move, which showed the government's commitment to its promise to pay whistleblowers 2.5% to 5% of the total amount recovered from their disclosures. Yet, this is no guarantee that corrupt practices within the public sector would disappear. The policy's potential to become a powerful tool in the "war against corruption" will remain limited so long as those who report wrongdoing are motivated by private gain rather than public welfare. Speaking up against wrongdoing can have immediate and unexpected repercussions for the whistle blower; therefore it is not a risk-free choice or action for anyone. It is crucial for whistle blowing policies to maintain the process's integrity to prevent its abuse or the victimisation of those who report fraudulent or unethical behaviour. Only then can these policies be considered successful. The decision to blow the whistle by an individual is not a straightforward one, however there is some agreement among researchers, stakeholders, and policymakers that the whistle blowing mechanism can be used to combat corruption. Research on whistleblower policies in Nigeria is still in its early stages, according to Onodugo (2015). Given the widespread corruption in Nigeria, many remain sceptical about the policy's ability to effectively reduce corruption in both the public and private sectors, despite apparent public support for the policy's capability to do so.

Statement of the Problem

Corruption is not rampant in Nigeria, according to studies and real-world examples. An effective system of laws, tools, and institutions has been established to combat this threat. In addition to the regular courts and police, Nigeria has various institutions designed to combat corruption in the country's economic, political, and government spheres. These include the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), etc. The irony of these countermeasures is that the institutions most lauded for their anti-corruption efforts have shown to be woefully inadequate. This is due to the fact that persons from Nigeria who have fallen victim to corruption themselves are in charge of these institutions. Not only are whistleblowers no longer protected, but the government also refuses to pay the proportionate share that should be paid to them. This has made the whistleblower policy, which is at the centre of our inquiry, both ineffective and severely undermined. Because of these factors, the whistle blowing initiative is no longer viable.

There is no need for Nigeria to continue seeking effective laws and institutions, as demonstrated by empirical evidence. Everything about our national life is marred by the failure of governance, which in turn is brought about by a lack of commitment and focus from leadership, as well as by a general lack of drive to make the institution work. It is not that the whistleblower policy is bound to fail; rather, it is that the system that oversees its implementation has grown corrupt, tasteless, full of deceit, a danger to human life, and generally prone to compromising and acquiring. This study will evaluate the Federal Government of Nigeria's strategy against corruption and its impact on whistleblowers in light of the aforementioned context.

Aims and Objectives

The main objective of this research is to assess the whistle blower policy of the Federal Government on corruption in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- examine the impact of the whistle blower reporting channels in mitigating the misappropriation of public funds among public office holders in Nigeria.
- evaluate the impact of the reward accruing to whistle blowers in reducing violation of public procurement procedures among public office holders in Nigeria.
- investigate the impact of the protection assurance for whistle blowers in eliminating bribery collection among public office holders in Nigeria.

Methodology

The federal government of Nigeria's policy regarding whistleblowers was examined in this study using a systematic review methodology. Secondary sources, such as academic journals, papers, and official government documents, were used to compile the data. Using a content analysis approach, we were able to categorize the findings into meaningful themes.

Theoretical Framework

Hoffman and McNulty's (2010) Universal Dignity Theory of Whistle Blowing (UDTW) served as the theoretical basis and epistemological pillar for this investigation. According to him, external whistle blowing is a form of rebellion against the organisational culture and, in order to be legal or enforced, must be backed by strong ethical arguments. If there is no proof of harm to society or if the whistleblower gives fake or fictional information out of animosity or revenge, then it is "morally prohibited" to blow the whistle. The following are the conditions under which it is acceptable to blow the whistle, as stated by (De George 1986), as referenced in (Hoffman and McNulty 2010).

- i. The target of the firm's product or policy, the general public, innocent bystanders, or product users, will suffer significant and negative consequences.
- ii. A worker has an ethical obligation to notify his or her direct supervisor of any material danger that he or she perceives to the public or product users. Without this, it is difficult to see how blowing the whistle could ever be justified.
- iii. The employee should try all internal options and processes within the company if their immediate supervisor does not resolve the issue. Common practice dictates escalating the issue to higher-ups in the management chain and, if required (and feasible), the board of directors.

According to this view, those who blow the whistle in Nigeria are not exactly on a messianic mission, and the act of blowing the whistle is more akin to a martyrdom. According to the UDTW, the duty to come clean should take a back seat to ensuring the whistleblower's safety. To rephrase, one should refrain from doing something if there is any evidence to suggest that it could put himself or others in harm's way. To make matters worse, this proposal doesn't appear specific enough to be useful in handling the issue in Nigeria. Whistle blowing almost always involves some level of risk to the whistleblower or others; if the risks are too great, then the whistle blowing may never happen. Given the uniqueness of the policy and the peculiarities of the Nigerian case, it's easy to see how whistleblowers' concerns about safety would play a significant role in their decision to disclose wrongdoing. Consequently, the policy's effectiveness may hinge on how it handles this issue.

Conceptual Issues on Whistle Blowing Policy in Nigeria

To "whistleblower" is to reveal an injustice that, for the sake of the public good, requires immediate redress or termination. That is how employees voice their concerns on the job (Oyebade, 2016). Ogunkeye (2016) defined it as the act of one person coming out to inform the public or those in charge about misconduct, corruption, illegality, or mismanagement; this person is often an employee of a commercial company or government agency. Simply put, "whistleblowing" refers to the practice of bringing public attention to wrongdoing inside an organisation or community in order to safeguard or preserve public interest. Anyone who learns about actions that hurt the public good or the company's financial or social interests could do this, including contractors, workers, customers, suppliers, or anyone else in the company.

There is still a lack of clarity regarding the administrative and implementation procedures that were put in place to oversee the program, and most Nigerians are wary of participating due to their scepticism about the government's sincerity and the policy's intentions. According to De Maria (2005), whistleblower policies in Africa are mostly targeting non-systematic corruption, which makes them ineffective because corruption in the continent is so organised and routine. No one in government, academia, industry, or society at large has the moral fibre to call out fellow citizens who engage in unethical behaviour since corruption has grown so systemic in most nations, including Nigeria (Taiwo, 2015).

Whistle blowing should ideally be a moral and ethical obligation. To be accepted in any culture, the moral duty to report wrongdoing may require justification and backing from cultural, social, religious, and legal standards. To ensure the long-term success of Nigeria's whistle blowing policy, it is essential to address the topic of purpose. The policy seems to be quiet on this topic, which is unfortunate. "If you report false or misleading information, it will be referred to the enforcement agents for investigation and possible prosecution" (FMF & FAQs, 2016) is the only statement regarding the whistleblower's motivation, though the program's requirements and submission process are detailed. So, the government doesn't care if the whistleblower was motivated by financial gain, jealousy, retaliation, or pure evil as long as the information they provided is accurate. Even though De George (1986) doesn't say anything about why someone should blow the whistle, he does imply that there should be a "moral motivation" behind it, thus it shouldn't be revenge-driven, for example. This goes against Bowie's (1982) standards for ethically acceptable whistle blowing, which state that the goal of exposing wrongdoing must not be financial gain or public acclaim. Although financial incentives for reporting wrongdoing are crucial, this study contends that they are too limited to encourage broader engagement and long-term support for the policy in Nigeria. Improving the policy's prospects requires a moral compass that will motivate people to view whistle blowing as a civic responsibility and obligation, and this must be conveyed successfully.

Conceptual Issues on Corruption

A universally applicable definition of corruption does not readily emerge. Because of this, it is considered a "difficult concept to define" and an elusive phenomenon that defies universal solution (Brunnelle-Quraishi, 2011; Ganahl, 2013). It is clear from the above that there is room for several and competing definitions of corruption. The absence of a universal prescription for a concept makes it susceptible to various manipulations and interpretations from different cultures. However, regardless of cultural differences, all of these conceptions may share a common denominator: corruption. Corruption has devastating effects on individuals, institutions, and the economy of states.

When set against the backdrop of corruption definitions offered by academics and institutions, the aforementioned background knowledge on corruption becomes much clearer. Brunnelle-Quraishi (2011) states that the Latin word *corruptus*, meaning "to break," is the origin of the English word corruption. If someone in a position of public authority violates the norms and regulations that govern their behaviour and actions, particularly if they use their privilege to enrich themselves

privately, then that person is corrupt, according to Khan (1996). Corruption, according to Ojiade (2000), is "any systematic vice perpetuated by individuals, society or a state in general" (emphasis added). This includes, but is not limited to, the following: favouritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment, wealth accumulation, abuse of office, power, position, etc.

According to Iyanda (2012), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), an anti-corruption agency in Nigeria, defines economic corruption as "any unlawful, nonviolent conduct with the goal of obtaining wealth, whether by an individual, a group, or an organised manner, in violation of laws regulating the economic activities of the government or its agencies." A common thread running through most of these definitions is the propensity for an individual or organisation to take advantage of their position for personal gain, with little regard for the well-being of the general public or the institution they work for, and in complete defiance of any oaths or other regulatory obligations they may have taken.

Corruption can mean many things to different people, but at its core, it is the unethical practice of abusing one's position of power in order to steal from or otherwise misuse public or private sector organisations' funds for one's own private gain. This can happen in both public and private sectors. Some scholars have broken corruption down into its component parts in order to take a more comprehensive view of the topic. The following are listed by Taylor (2010): Political corruption happens when those in positions of power, who are supposed to represent the people and pass laws, are themselves corrupt. It also occurs when lawmakers and politicians' interests are prioritised in policymaking and legislation.

Corruption within bureaucracies: This kind of corruption happens in government agencies or at the level of policy implementation. People experience this type of corruption on a daily basis at places like schools, hospitals, police stations, municipal licensing offices, and other government departments, among other places. When private individuals get access to public sector contracts through corrupt means, this is known as bureaucratic corruption. Vote buying, disenfranchisement, ballot box theft, victimisation and maiming, and mutilation of election results in favour of losers and votes appearing in areas where they were not cast are all examples of electoral corruption.

Bribery refers to the corrupt practice of accepting or giving money or other valuables in order to influence another party. Included in this category are terms like "kickbacks," "gratuities," "pay off," "sweeteners," "greasing palms," and "scratching of back."

The term "fraud" refers to a wide range of dishonest activities, including but not limited to: counterfeiting, racketing, smuggling, and forgery.

Embezzlement is the unauthorised use of public funds by those in positions of authority. It occurs when a public servant embezzles funds from the agency for which they work. Some speculate that the absence of stringent regulatory structures in Nigeria contributes to the prevalence of public fund misappropriation as a means of wealth acquisition in the country. Extortion is the use of coercion, violence, or threats of violence to obtain money or other resources.

A common perception is that it is a bottom-up extraction. **Favouritism:** A form of power abuse that suggests a very biased allocation of governmental resources. A lot of people, though, think this is just a normal human tendency to show preference to those we are close to and trust. Nepotism is a particular form of favouritism in which a public official shows preference for members of his or her own family. Nepotism happens when someone is exempt from the application of rules or regulations or given unfair preference in the distribution of limited resources (Nkpoyen, Bassey, & Uyang, 2014). In today's society, these kinds of unethical behaviours are so commonplace that they are accepted as culture (Ajie & Wokekoro, 2012).

Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

The character of a society's economy is often associated with the main causes of corruption. That is to say, the dominant pattern of behaviour in each given community is dictated by its economic status. The official poverty rate in Nigeria is 54% as of 2011 (NBS). Thus, widespread and chronic poverty, high levels of material deprivation, and other structural inequities are seen by many to amplify corruption. Corruption, according to (Shamija 2006), is a coping strategy or means by which Nigerians avoid or lessen the impact of poverty. This is especially true in Nigeria's major cities, where the high expense of living may encourage or even encourage corruption. Corruption offers a way to supplement one's legal income in a circumstance when wages are insufficient and payments are frequently not paid. (Ayua, 2001) cites malfunctioning government budgets, delays in the release of budget monies, including pay, low and declining salaries in the civil service, and promotions that are not based on performance to back up the claims made above. Bedford(2000), who sought to place corruption in Nigeria in perspective, posits that tribal affiliations were its cultural underpinnings. Consequently, it appears that some corrupt activities are fostered by our culture. There is little incentive to become honest now that bribery and favour exchange are the norm. There is a clear danger of corruption becoming institutionalised in this subculture, where it is seen as the usual way of life. The idea of the "big man" with his flaunted fortune and entourage of minions and clients has become deeply ingrained in traditional culture. An individual is considered a "big man" in this context if he has multiple dependents, is financially responsible for their support, and possesses a house and automobile collection commensurate with his social standing. Many Nigerians engaged in corrupt behaviours, and this explains why. Once again, corruption thrives in environments where there is strong pressure from extended families and ethnic attachments. Because of these pressures, officials resorted to dishonest means to ensure that their relatives could secure jobs, regardless of whether they were qualified. In addition, different ethnic groups often resort to extreme measures to get access to and control over key economic and administrative posts. Once in power, people would resort to any means necessary, legal or otherwise, to guarantee that their families receive what is commonly known as "our share of the national cake" in Nigeria, regardless of how fair it is or how irrational the resulting imbalance may be (Ayua 2001).

Corruption goes unpunished by the government: The government's apparent unwillingness to penalise corruption gives the appearance of backing, as pointed out by Shamija (2006). Apparently, the government enjoys forming inquiry panels and commissions of enquiries, but they never release

their results or put their suggestions into action, according to media reports. Take the case of the EFCC and ICPC, whose anti-corruption efforts have so far failed to produce the desired outcomes.

Governmental Weakness: Governmental weakness in Nigeria is one of the factors that fosters corruption. Weak governmental institutions amplify corrupt tendencies. For instance, if a tax has confiscation rates, bribery may increase because taxpayers would rather pay less tax overall. This reminds me of the Nigerian pension scheme administration, which has been marked by embezzlement and plain misappropriation of funds (This Day, March 27, 2007). The main contributor to corruption in Nigeria is a lack of exemplary leadership. Since Nigeria's independence, the country has struggled with a lack of outstanding leadership. Military and civilian leaders alike have put their own interests ahead of the nation's when making policy and choices. The issue in Nigeria stems from the country's leaders' reluctance or incapacity to take on the role of role model, which are characteristics of effective leadership, as stated by Achebe (1983:1). This claim shows that Nigeria has a leadership problem. Instead of battling corruption, the leaders of this country who have come before them have gotten rich off of it, enriching themselves at the cost of the people.

Conclusion

There has been little progress in Nigeria's social, political, economic, and human growth due to the pervasive corruption. Findings indicate that public office holders in Nigeria are less likely to violate public procurement procedures, that whistleblower reporting channels help reduce instances of public funds misappropriation, and that protection assurance for whistleblowers helps reduce incidents of public procurement violations.

Recommendations

Based on findings, the following recommendations are made on the study:

1. To try corruption cases, special courts should be established. Cases of corruption will be resolved more quickly as a result.
2. Those found guilty of corrupt conduct in our legal system ought to face severe punishment. Let us, if at all feasible, model our criminal punishment policies after China's. Someone who is looking to be driven by corruption and sharp acts of generosity might find this to be a strong deterrent.
3. Third, in order to deal with instances involving corrupt individuals more quickly, Nigeria's judicial and legal system needs a review and restructuring.
4. Nigeria's anti-corruption bodies, including the EFCC and the ICPC, should step up their efforts to combat the country's pervasive corruption.
5. In order to bring rationality to the administration of justice, it is imperative to maintain the rule of law. Corrupt officials must be treated equally. Since the law does not care about people, there should be "no sacred cows" and no leeway for breaking the rules.

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