

SECURITY SECTOR CORRUPTION AND PUBLIC SAFETY IN NIGERIA: FROM PROTECTORS TO PREDATORS

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Abstract

This paper examines the security sector in Nigeria and how corruption constraints the institutions that ought to be protectors of the state and citizens to instruments of private gain and political manipulation. The Nigeria's security institutions' originally mandated to safeguard the state and protect citizens, have increasingly become tools for private enrichments and political consolidation. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of state capture and the political economy of corruption, the study explores how enriched corrupt practices within the military, police, and intelligence agencies have eroded institutional integrity, weakened operational capacity, and facilitated the consolidation of power by political and economic elites. Using a qualitative methodology that synthesizes secondary data, policy reports and case studies from 1999 to 2024, the paper reveals that systemic corruption in security institutions not only undermines the rule of law but also entrenches cycles of violence, impunity and governance failure. Findings highlight how political actors exploit security agencies for electoral manipulation, suppression of dissent, and protection of illicit economic network. The paper argues that this nexus between corruption and state capture deepens insecurity, delegitimizes state authority, and stalls democratic consolidation. Recommendations include comprehensive security sector reforms, enhanced allocation, and the de-politicization of security leadership to restore public trust and institutional accountability.

Keywords: Corruption, Security institutions, STATE CAPTURE, Governance, Nigeria

Introduction

Security institutions comprising the military Police, and Intelligence agencies are essential to maintaining state authority, public order, and democratic governance in any country. By design and setting, these institutions exist to protect citizens, enforce laws of the state impartially, and defend the national sovereignty.

However, in many developing states, Nigeria to be precise, these institutions have been believed to be compromised by endemic corruption and political interference, leading to a fundamental erosion of their constitutional mandates (Akinola, 2017).

To this effect, this study is set to: (1) examine the effect of corruption on the security sector in Nigeria and how such influence has transformed these institutions from protectors to

predators.(2)To identify and map the forms of corruption present within the Nigerian security sector.(3) To analyze how systemic factors such as weak oversight, political interference, inadequate remuneration, and lack of accountability enable corruption among security actors and (4), to propose practical, evidence based recommendations for strengthening transparency, accountability, professionalism and ethical conducts in the security sector

Worthy of note is the fact that since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, the security sector has been plagued by increasing cases of abuse of power, bribery, embezzlement, and complicity in electoral fraud (Ibeanu, 2007, Smith, 2019). Corruption within security institutions manifests in multiple forms ranging from compromised recruitment and promotion processes to the misappropriation of funds intended for operational needs (Omotola, 2010). This systemic Corruption has not only weakened the capacity of these noble institutions to effectively combat crimes and insurgency but has also transformed them into tools for political patronage and repression (Nwankpa, 2021).

The concept of State Capture is useful to understand this phenomenon. State Capture occurs when powerful elites manipulate State Institutions to serve their private interest rather than the public good (Hellman, Jones & Kaufman, 2000). In Nigeria, the security sector has become a critical domain of capture, where political actors exert control over security agencies to suppress opposition, influence elections, and safeguard illegal economic networks (Lewis, 2014; Adebaniwi & Obadere, (2017). It is the convergence of corruption and State Capture of these institutions that have resulted to a paradigm shift, "From Protectors to Predators". In Nigeria, these institutions were originally designed to function as impartial enforcers of laws and safeguarding national sovereignty (Fatola, 2017). However, over the past few decades, these bodies have increasingly deviated from their constitutionally mandated roles, succumbing to endemic and systemic corruption and becoming instruments of political patronage and elite domination (Ojo, 2020).

Corruption in the Security Sector undermines merit in recruitment processes which most often excludes competence and favour loyalty. In some other times, inflated procurement contracts that funnel public resources into private hands become the order of the day (Adebaniwi, 2017). Such systemic malpractices undermines the operational capacity and morale of these institutions, weakening their ability to effectively combat threat ranging from insurgency to organized crimes (United Nations Development programme [UNDP], 2021). Moreover, the politicization of security agencies exacerbates social tensions by facilitating selective enforcement, electoral manipulation, and suppression of dissenting voices (Falana, 2019).

The consequences of this "Protector-to-Predator" transformation are profound. Public trust in security institutions has eroded significantly, fuelling cycles of insecurity and citizen disillusionment (Obi, 2019). The delegitimization of these institutions undermines the rule of law and hampers Nigeria's democratic consolidation, threatening both political stability and sustainable development (Ibrahim & Amuwo, 2021). Against this backdrop, comprehensive reforms aimed at depoliticizing security leadership, enhancing transparency and instituting robust civilian oversight are urgently needed to restore integrity and accountability (Chattam House, 2020).

This paper critically examines the dynamics of corruption within Nigeria's Security Sector and its role in facilitating State Capture. By analysing institutional weakness, political incentives, and historical contexts, it seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how protectors become predators. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates on Security Sector reforms and governance in fragile democracies, offering policy recommendations to reclaim security institutions as genuine guardians of the Nigerian State and Society.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Conceptualizing Corruption in security Institutions

Corruption, broadly defined, refers to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (Transparency International, 2022). Within security institutions, corruption can manifest in various forms, including bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, and the manipulation of recruitment processes (Adebanwi, 2017). These corrupt practices not only divert resources but also distort institutional priorities, undermine operation efficiency, and erode public trust. The insidious nature of corruption in security agencies is particularly damaging because these bodies hold coercive power and are expected to enforce the rule of law impartially (Obi, 2019).

Banini(2020) argues that corruption within the Nigerian military significantly undermines counter insurgency operations against Boko Haram. He demonstrates that diversion of defence funds, inflated procurement contracts, and mismanagement of resources result in poorly equipped troops and low morale, thereby compromising battlefield effectiveness. This perspective supports the broader argument that corruption directly translates into operational failure and prolonged conflicts.

Ene and Wilson (2025) contend that opaque procurement processes in the police and military have deprived security agencies of essential weapons, equipment, and logistics. Funds allocated for national defence are often siphoned through inflated contracts or misappropriated by senior officials, leaving Frontline personnel under-resourced. This view aligns with earlier studies that link procurement corruption to institutional decay and operational inefficiency (Hope, 2017). The diversion of security funds not only weakens State capacity but also emboldens non state armed actors, thereby tilting the balance of power sway from the state.

Moreover, Scholars note that police corruption is closely linked to human rights abused, including excessive use of force and extrajudicial actions (Amnesty International, 2020). Such abuse further delegitimise the police and undermines community cooperation, which is critical for effective policing.

Political interference in recruitment, promotion, and deployment of security personnel, has been identified as a major challenge. When loyalty to political patrons supersedes professionalism, security institutions become tool of elite interests rather than neutral protectors of the public good (Hope, 2017). This governance failure contributes to the perception of security agencies as instruments of operations and exploitation.

Understanding State Capture

State Capture simply put, is a form of systemic corruption where powerful individuals or groups shape and influence a country's laws, policies, and institutions to serve their private interests (Hellman, Jones, & Kaufmann, 2000). Unlike petty or bureaucratic corruption, state captures involves manipulating the very frame works that govern the political and economic life, effectively "capturing" the state. In Nigeria, state capture has been characterized by political elites' control over security institutions, enabling them to use these agencies as instruments for maintaining power, suppressing opposition, and protecting illicit economic interests (Lewis, 2019).

The Nexus Between Corruption and Security Institutions, A Review Approach

The relationship between corruption in security institutions and governance outcomes is complex and cyclical. Corruption weakens the capacity of security agencies to fulfil their mandates, leading to compromised law enforcement, unchecked human rights abuses, and the perpetuation of insecurity (Ibrahim & Amuwo, 2021). Simultaneously, compromised security institutions enable further corruption by protecting vested interest and creating a climate of impunity. This dynamic undermines democratic governance by eroding public confidence, fostering political instability, and stalling development (Falana, 2019).

According to Mohammed, Adami, and Pius(2023), corruption is a cancer undermining peace and security in Nigeria, making it almost impossible for the security agencies to effectively and efficiently respond to threats. They link corruption directly to deepening insecurity in various parts of the country.

In the views of Yagboyayu(2023), corruption prevalent across internal security institutions including the Army and prison services, and describes it as a threat to internal security. The article argued that corruption enabled abuse and misuse of resources undercuts operational effectiveness.

Moreso, Robert and Ogini(2025) analyze how corruption in procurement processes within the Police and Military has deprived forces of necessary weapons and equipment. They highlight weak oversight,lack of transparency, and politicized decision making as central drivers of procurement corruption.

Empirically,Salihu(2019) points out to how Corruption among police officers in Kwara state to be specific contributes to poor welfare, inadequate resources, and reduced operational effectiveness, linking corruption with both institutional dysfunction and community insecurity.

By and large, Oke(2023) frames police corruption as both a response to hostile conditions and a source of broader social harm. He argued further that poor working environments and low morale contribute to corrupt and violent conduct within the Police.

Theoretical Lens: State Capture Theory and the Political Economy of Corruption

This study employs state capture theory as its primary analytical framework to explain how political and economic elites co-opt Nigeria's security institutions. This theory was initially developed, and popularized by economists and political scientists Daniel Kaufman, Joel Hillman and Mikael M.S. Jones in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Their Seminar work titled, "Seize the State, Seize the Day: State Capture, Corruption, and Influence in Transition" (2000), published as a World Bank Policy research paper, is widely credited with formalizing the theory. They defined State Capture as the efforts by individuals, groups, or firms to influence the formation of laws, policies, and regulations to their own advantage through illicit or non-transparent means.

State Capture theory highlights the ways in which elites manipulate formal institutions to serve private ends, thus disturbing governance structures (Hellman et al., 2000; Lewis, 2019). In this context, security agencies shift from neutral "Protectors" of public order to "Predators" that enforce elite interests. To this end, this framework illuminates the structural and agency factors driving corruption and state capture in Nigeria's Security Sector, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and political reform pathways.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. The qualitative descriptive method is considered appropriate here because it enabled an in depth and systematic descriptive of corruption within Nigeria's security sector as it exists, without attempting to manipulate variables or test casual relationships statistically. A qualitative methodology is a research approach used to understand people's experiences, perspectives, behaviors, and the meanings they attach to events or situations. Rather than focusing on numbers and statistical data, it collects non-numerical data, such as words, observations, images, or documents. The method allows the study to capture patterns, practices, and institutional behaviors that explain how security agencies have shifted from their constitutional roles as protectors to predators due to corruption. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly suitable for studies involving sensitive governance and security issues, where numerical data may be limited or unreliable, and where contextual interpretation is required.

The study also relies exclusively on secondary source of data, due to the sensitive nature of the security sector operations and limited access to primary security data. Data source includes :

- (1) Peer reviewed academic journals and books on corruption, security governance, and Nigerian politics.
- (2) Government publications, White papers and audit reports
- (3) Reports from international organizations such as Transparency international Amnesty etc.

Discussion on Historical Overview of Security Institutions in Nigeria

The evolution of security institutions in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the Country's Colonial and Post Independence History. From early 20th century to the present day, security agencies have been shaped by political exigencies, ethnic dynamics, militarization, and governance challenges. Their historical development offers key insights into the institutional weakness and vulnerabilities that have continued and contributed to corruption and State Capture in the Contemporary period.

Colonial Foundation of Nigeria's Security Institutions 1861- 1960

The origins of Nigeria's modern security institutions date back to the colonial era, when the then British Administration established security forces primarily to serve colonial interests. The earliest security outfit was the Colonial Police Force, organized along regional and ethnic lines to enforce colonial authority and suppress dissent (Alemika, 1993). Similarly, the military evolved from the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), which was established in 1897 to protect British economic and political interest across the region (Osaghae, 1998).

It will be pertinent to note that these Colonial Security bodies were not designed to protect the Nigerian populace or uphold democratic governance. Rather, they were coercive instruments of State control, marked by repression and exclusion of local population from meaningful oversight or participation. This legacy of authoritarianism and lack of accountability would carry over into the post-independence era.

Post-Independence and military Rule (1960-1999)

Sequel to Independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a centralized and hierarchical security structure. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was established as a National force but retained many colonial era practices, including a strong emphasizes on coercion and weak oversight mechanisms (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

The situation deteriorated further during Nigeria's long period of military rule, which spanned from 1966 to 1999, with brief interruptions. During this time, security institutions especially the military and intelligence services were politicized and instrumentalized by the successive regimes to suppress dissents, enforce authoritarian rule, and enrich elite networks (Agbese, 2007). The Nigerian Armed Forces became Central actors in governance, leading o blurred boundaries between civil and military spheres.

Military regimes established and expanded intelligence services, such as the National Security Organization (NSO), the precursor to today's Department of State Services (DSS), which was used more for political surveillance than for national protection (Obi, 2019). The same period also saw widespread corruption within military hierarchy, with patronage networks flourishing and institutional discipline deteriorating.

The Democratic Era and Security sector expansion (1999 to date).

The return to democratic rule in 1999 was expected to bring about reform and democratization of the security sector. However, the transition revealed deep –seated institutional weakness, a legacy of militarization, and persistent elite manipulation. Despite constitutional, and persisted elite manipulation. Despite constitutional reforms and the creation of oversight agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), corruption and lack of accountability remain pervasive.

In the 2000s, Nigeria expanded its security architecture in response to emerging threats such as Niger Delta military and, later Boko Haram insurgency. New agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) were created. Yet, many of these institutions have been plagued by politicization (Ghattam House, 2020).

Today, Nigeria's security sector includes the Nigeria Army, Navy and Air Forces, The Nigerian Police Force, the department of State Services; paramilitary forces; and various intelligence and anti-corruption agencies. However, these institutions operate in a fragmented manner, with overlapping mandates, weak inter-agency Coordination, and limited civilian oversight. The continued misuse of security forces for electoral violence, suppression of protests, and protection of elites interests reflects the failure of meaningful reform (Ibrahim & Amuwo, 2021).

Constitutional Mandates of Security Institutions In Nigeria

The mandates of security institutions in Nigeria are derived primarily from the 1999 Constitution (as Amended), along with specific Acts of the National Assembly that establish and regulate each security agency.

These are the breakdown of the key security institutions in Nigeria and their constitutional legal mandates

1. Nigerian Armed Forces

According to Section 217 – 220 of the 1999 Constitution, the Nigerian Armed Forces are saddled with following mandates;

- Defend Nigeria from external aggression
- Maintain territorial integrity and secure Nigeria's borders
- Suppress insurrection and act in aid to civil authorities (when requested by the President)
- Perform such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly

2. Nigerian Police Force (NPF)

Section 214 -216 of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution as amended outlined the following as the mandates of the Nigeria Police Force;

- Maintain Public Order and Safety;
- Protect lives and property,
- Prevent and detect crimes
- Enforce Laws and Regulations

3. State Security Services (SSS/DSS)

Their legal basis is derived from National Security Agencies Act. (Capn74, LFN, 2004). Their mandates include the following;

- Protect and defend the Federal Republic of Nigeria against internal threats
- Uphold and enforce the criminal laws of Nigeria related to internal security
- Provide security for senior government officials and sensitive facilities

4. National Intelligence Agency (NIA)

Their legal basis is from National Security Agency Act. Their mandate include;

- Responsible for foreign intelligence and counter intelligence operatives
- Gather and analyse external intelligence to support national security

5. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)

Their mandate and legal basis are derived from National Security Agencies Act. Their mandate Act. Their Mandate include;

- Provide military intelligence to the Nigerian Armed Forces and Military of Defense
- Coordinate defense related intelligence activities both internally and externally

6. Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC)

Legal Basis: NSCDS Act N0 2 of 2003 (as amended in 2007). Their mandates

- Protect critical national assets and infrastructure

- Assist in maintaining peace and order
- Provide disaster response and civil protection

7. Economic and Financial Crimes and Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)

Though these commissions above are not military or police Institutions, these agencies contributes to internal security through;

- ✓ Investigating and prosecuting economic and financial crimes (EFCC)
- ✓ Combating corruption in Public Services (ICPC)

Overview of the Nigerian Security Landscape

The Landscape of Nigeria's security is complex, multifaceted, and characterized by a mix of traditional, emerging, and asymmetric threats. Despite the presence of multiple constitutionally mandated security agencies, the country continues to face severe internal and external security challenges that threaten national unity, economic development, and democratic governance.

Amongst the most pressing security concerns in Nigeria are:

a. Terrorism and Insurgency

The Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East, and the emergence of the offshoot, the Islamic State West. Africa province (ISWAP), have posed significant threats to national security since 2009 (International Crisis group, 2021). Despite counter-insurgency efforts by the Nigerian Armed Forces, these groups continue to conduct deadly attacks on both civilian and military targets.

b. Banditry and Kidnapping for Ransom

This is the another security concerns. Heavily armed bandits in the North-West and North –Central regions conduct mass abductions and attacks on rural communities. These criminal enterprises are driven by poor governance, economic inequality, and porous borders (Akinola, 2021).

c. Farmer- Herder Conflicts

The conflicts between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers, particularly in the middles belt, have escalated into large –scale violence, often with ethnic and religious dimensions(Okoh, Atelhe, 2014).

d. Military and Oil Theft

This is a common place in the Niger Delta region. Militant groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers attack oil infrastructure, while oil theft and illegal refining have become pervasive (Ikelegbe, 2005).

These activities compromise national revenue and environmental safety.

e. Separatist Agitations

Groups like the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) have reignited separatist demands, leading to violent confrontations with state security forces. These movements reflect deeper issues of perceived marginalization and structural inequality (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013).

f. Cybercrime and organized crime

Cybercrime, including identity theft, phishing, and online fraud, has become widespread, particularly among Nigerians' youth (Tade, 2020). In addition, Nigeria is a major transit route for human and drug trafficking networks.

g. Weak Law Enforcement and Judicial System

Corruption, underfunding, and poor training weaken the effectiveness of Law Enforcement agencies, while slow and politicized judicial processes erode public trust in the rule of law (Transparency International, 2023). It is pertinent to note that, despite having a comprehensive security apparatus, including the military, police and Intelligence agencies, operational ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Lack of coordination limit the effectiveness of Nigeria's security institutions response to these multifaceted threats.

h. Security Institutions and State Capture

Security Institutions, such as the police, military, intelligence service, and paramilitary bodies are fundamental pillars of any State's sovereignty, stability and legitimacy. In functional democracies, they serve the public good by protecting lives, upholding the rule of law, and maintaining territorial integrity. However, in a fragile or transitional democracies such as Nigeria, these institutions are often vulnerable to elite manipulation, politicization, and systemic corruption. This phenomenon is increasingly understood through the lens of 'State Capture' which is a situation where narrow elite interests dominate state institutions, policies, and Laws to serve private goals rather than the public interest. (Hellma, Jones, & Kaufmana, 2000).

In Nigeria's context, State capture has not only undermined the democratic function of governance but has also perverted the role of security institutions. Rather than serving as protectors of citizens, many security bodies have become tool for repression, gent-seeking, and

elite entrenchment. Importantly, security institutions become capture when:

- Leadership appointment are based on political loyalty, or ethnic balancing rather than competence.
- Budget allocations and operational directives are used to reward political allies or suppress dissent.
- Oversight bodies (e.g. police service commissions, legislative committees are weakened or compromised).
- Law enforcement selectively targets regime critics while shielding allies from prosecution etc. manifestations of state capture in Nigeria security institutions.

A. Politicization of Appointments

It is evidence that top-level appointments in the Nigeria police force, armed forces, and intelligence community often reflect political patronage or ethno-regional considerations.

This, in no small measure undermines professionalism and promotes loyalty to individual politicians rather than to the constitution (Obi, 2016). Take for instance; successive administrations have been accuse of appointing security chiefs form particular regions or religious blocs, sparking concerns about bias and regional imbalance in law enforcement.

B. Militarization of Civil Governance

Remarkably and interestingly, since the return to democracy in 1999, the military has been frequently deployed for internal operations that traditionally fall within the police mandate (such as election security, urban crime control, and even protest management). This persistent deployment suggests not only a weakened police force but also a form of informal military co-governance, which often unaccountable and repressive (Sahara Reporters, 2021). Security is thus used not merely to fight insecurity but to enrich political power.

C. Corruption and Security Budget Secrecy

This Nigerian defense and security sector is one of the most opaque in terms of budget in terms of budgetary processes. Despite receiving some of the highest budgetary allocations, little transparency exists around procurement and operational expenses. Investigations such as the Dasuki gate scandal (2015) revealed two billons of naira meant for arms procurement were diverted by top military and political elites for electoral manipulation and personal enrichment (premium times, 2016). This is a clear testament of security sector state capture.

D. Suppression of Dissent and Selective Policing

Security agencies are often deployed to target protesters, journalists, and opposition figures while turning a blind eye to abuse by pro-governmental actors. Notable examples include the violent suppression of the End SARS protests in 2020 and the prolonged detention of dissenters like Omoyele Sowore and Nnamdi Kanu, while politically connected individuals facing corruption charges enjoy impunity (Amnesty International, 2020)

E. Overlapping and Fragment Mandates

The proliferation of security outfits such as the Civil Defense Corps, Department of State Security Service (DSS), and numerous task forces has created overlapping jurisdictions. This fragmentation creates institutions turf wars and leaves room for political manipulation of mandates, in some cases, governors and powerful elites use paramilitary units or private security arrangements for political and economic control (Adobanwi, 2014).

The capture of security institutions has had far-reaching consequences as follows:

- Erosion of public trust in law enforcement and military professionalism.
- Declining morale among officers who are poorly trained, unpaid, or sidelined.
- Expansion of violent non-state actors (e.g. Boko-Haram, bandits, unknown gunmen, secessionists), who usually exploit governance vacuums.
- Increased internal repression and shrinking civic peace.
- Persistent insecurity, despite rising security budgets and militarized responses. In effect, Nigeria's insecurity crisis is not simply the result of inadequate force or weapons; it is a structural outline of institutional corruption and elite manipulation.

Challenges in implementation of constitutional mandates of security institutions in Nigeria.

Despite being legally, provide for in the constitution and enabling statutes, the operational effectiveness of Nigeria's security institutions is hampered by several systemic challenges. These weaknesses undermine their ability to fulfill their constitutional responsibility in security lives, property, and national integrity. These challenges include:

a) Overlapping Mandates And Inter-Agency Rivalry

The existence of multiple security agencies with overlapping functions such as the Nigeria Police Force, DSS, NSCDC, and the Armed Forces, creates competition rather than cooperation. This often results in duplication of roles and jurisdictional conflicts (Olaopa, 2018).

b) Centralized Command Structure

The Nigeria constitution vests security powers predominantly in the federal government, leaving states with limited control over law enforcement (sections 2014-2016) of the amended 1999

constitution. This hampers community policing efforts and creates a disconnect between local needs and centralized command (Onapajo, 2019).

c) Inadequate Funding And Poor Logistics

Security agencies frequently operate under inadequate budgets and lack modern tools for surveillance and operations. Misappropriation of defense spending has further worsened the logistics crisis (premium times, 2021).

d) Corruption And Political Interference

Security institutional are often politicize, with loyalty to political figures taking precedence over professionalism. Corruption in recruitment, procurement, and deployment reduces efficiency and public confidence (Uadiale&Adegbite, 2022).

e) Legal Ambiguity And Weak Over Sight

According to Ekpo and chime, (2021), some security institutions, like the DSS, operates under broad and vaguely defined mandates. The lack of parliamentary and judicial over sight limits transparency and allows for unchecked power.

Case studies:Corruption and state capture in Nigeria's security institutions

1. The 2014-2015 Dasuki Arms Procurement Scandal

Sambo Dasuki, the then National Security Adviser under president Good luck Jonathan was accused of diverting over \$2.1 billion meant for arms procurement to politicians, cronies and phantom contracts. Funds were allegedly launder through defense vendors and use to finance the ruling party's 2015 campaign. Military personnel's were left underequipped in the fight against Boko-Haram, despite massive budgets allocations. This case exemplified how political elites capture security budgets to finance their power retention, undermining (Olaopa, 2018).

2. Military Involvement In The 2019 General Elections

Politicization and weaponization of security forces was evidence during envy general elections in Nigeria, but 2019, general elections to be precise. During a forenamed election, the military and police were accuse of interfering in the electoral process, especially in Rivers, Lagos and Bayelsa states. Reports had it that soldiers allegedly blocked polling units, seized materials, and harassed voters and observers.

The independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was reportedly present by powerful political figures to facilitate the deployment of loyal forces. This, in no small measures reveals how political actors manipulate security agencies secure electoral outcomes, turning protectors into enforcers of elite's dominance (Ekpo, 2019).

3. End SARS Protests And The Lekki Toll Gate Shooting (2020)

This was a clear repression of dissent and lack of accountability. Peaceful protesters demanding an end to police brutality were shot at Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos on October 20, 2020. Evidence pointed to involvement of the Nigerian Army, although the military initially denied any deployment (Umeadi, 2022). Subsequent investigations were hindered by lack of cooperation from federal authorities and suppression of panel findings (Akinola, 2021). State capture dynamics: security forces were used to suppress a citizen movement challenging institutional abuse, with accountability mechanisms circumvented by the state reflecting how elites shield security institutions from scrutiny to preserve the status quo.

4. Political Use Of The Department Of State Service (DSS)

There is evidence of intelligence capture and suppression of opposition. Under different administrations, the DSS has been accused of detaining critics, journalists, and opposition figures under vague charges of “threat to National security”. Take for instance, activist; O moyelesoworse was arrested in 2019 for planning a protest titled “Revolution Now”. The same DSS repeatedly disobeyed court orders for his release and even that of Nnamdi Kanu, raising concerns over executive influence on intelligence operations. This demonstrates how security agencies are used to silence dissent and protect elite power, by passing rule of law processes.

5. Oil Bunkering And The Security Sector's Complicity

This shows the nexus between criminal, elites and security operatives in Nigeria. Nigeria loses billions annually to illegal oil bunkering, often carried out with the connivance of military personnel.

Reports have shown military checkpoints along the Niger Delta used to facilitate oil theft operations. In some cases, whistle blowers and investigative journalists exposing these networks have faced intimidation. This reflects how security institutions become embedded in criminal economies. Protecting elite beneficiaries and allowing corruption to fester under the guise of national security operations. All the above cases demonstrate that Nigeria's security institutions have repeatedly compromised by corruption and elite manipulation. Whether through financial fraud, electoral interference, or the suppression of civic freedoms fighter, these incidents highlight the erosion of the rule of law and democratic norms.

Policy implications and reform strategies (Recommendations):

1. Comprehensive Security Sector Reform (SSR)

- **Institutional Restructuring:** Revise organizational frameworks within the military, police, and intelligence agencies to close loopholes that enable corruption and political manipulation.

- **Professionalization:** Establish merit-based recruitment, promotions, and training programs.
 - **Accountability Frame Works:** Implement clear codes of conduct and disciplinary mechanisms with independent oversight to sanction corrupt behavior effectively.
- 2. Enhancing Civilian Oversight And Democratic Control**
- Empowered oversight bodies: strengthen parliamentary committees ,independent anti-corruption Commissions, and civil society watchdogs with real authority and resources to monitor security agencies.
 - Mandate regular disclosure of budgets, procurement, contracts and operational activities to reduce opacity. This will ensure transparency
 - Depoliticization of Security leadership
 - Meritocratic appointment: Ensure top security positions are filled based on qualifications and professional track records rather than political patronage or ethnic /regional considerations.
 - Fixed tenure and protections: Establish fixed terms and safeguards against arbitrary dismissal to insulate security Chiefs from political pressure.
- 4. Transparent Resources Allocation and Financial management**
- Audit and monitoring Systems: Deploy robust financial controls and independent audits to track security sector expenditures. Limiting opportunities for embezzlement and kickbacks.
 - Budget Reforms: Increase parliamentary security of security budgets and eliminate off-budget expenditures that lack transparency.
- 5. Anti-corruption Laws should be strengthened to close legal loopholes that allow impunity among.**
- 6. Enact and enforce Laws protecting whistleblowers within security agencies who exposes corruption or abuse etc.**

Conclusion

The study has examined the phenomenon of security sector corruption in Nigeria and its implication for national security governance, and State legitimacy. Drawing on a qualitative descriptive analysis of existing literature and policy reports, the study demonstrates that corruption within Nigeria's security institutions is not incidental but systematic, deeply rooted in institutional structures, governance practices, and elite control. Rather than functioning solely as protectors roles, it exhibits actions characterised by bribery, extortion, procurement fraud, abuse of power and human rights violations.

- The findings underscore that corruption significantly weakens the operational effectiveness of security agencies, undermines morale among personnel,diverts critical resources away from security provision. These dynamics have contributed to the persistence of insecurity across the country, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence. More critically, corruption has eroded public trusts in security institutions, diminishing citizens cooperation and weakening the social contract between the state and society.
- The study further reveals that security sector corruption in Nigeria is driven by broader governance failures, including weak oversight mechanisms, political interference, lack of accountability, and poor institutional transparency. These structural deficiencies enable elite capture of the security agencies and perpetuates a cycle in which insecurity and corruption mutually reinforce one another. In this context, security institutions become instruments of private gains rather than public service, thereby exacerbating state fragility.

Recommendations

To address the above security challenges, the following measures are recommended:

- (1) Comprehensive reform of the whole security institutions which anchors on transparency, meritocracy, and strong civilian oversight.
- (2) Depoliticization of security leadership which enhances accountability will also go along way in arresting the situation.
- (3) Ensuring a clear separation of power and enthronelement of financial independence for security agencies will help also to avert the influence of corruption on the security sector in Nigeria.

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