
Research

A legal and strategic framework for reform is provided by Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Combat Systemic Corruption in Nigeria.

Bukar A. Umar^{1*}, Umar Abdullahi Chiroma¹

¹University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

Correspondence should be addressed to: bukarabdullahumar@unimaid.edu.ng

Abstract: development, causing institutional integrity and the rule of law to suffer. Although traditional anti-corruption mechanisms are robust in their statutory design, they have frequently failed because of manual inefficiencies, human interference, and a lack of transparency in data. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), specifically Artificial Intelligence (AI), has the potential to transform Nigeria from a reactive to a proactive approach to combating corruption, according to this article. By analyzing strategic applications in public procurement, financial intelligence, and asset monitoring, this paper explores the legal, ethical, and infrastructural hurdles, such as the "black box" problem and evidentiary admissibility, that must be navigated to successfully automate integrity within the Nigerian legal ecosystem.

Keywords: Corruption, Artificial Intelligence, leverage, Combating, Nigeria, Reform.

1.0 Introduction

The Nigerian state has long grappled with the pervasive nature of corruption, a phenomenon that permeates both the upper echelons of political leadership and the lower ranks of administrative service. This paper defines systemic corruption within the Nigerian context by distinguishing between "Petty Corruption" - the daily graft encountered by citizens in public offices - and "Grand Corruption" - the large-scale theft of state resources by high-ranking officials.

AI's introduction into governance is more than just a technological change as we move through the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR); it is a fundamental restructuring of how transparency is enforced. The central theme of this work is that AI can facilitate a

transition from reactive enforcement, where the state acts only after the theft has occurred, to a proactive framework where predictive algorithms identify and prevent corrupt acts in real time. The research is conducted using a legal-comparative approach, taking into account the limitations of current infrastructure and proposing a roadmap for legislative and ethical synchronization.

The sphere of systemic corruption in Nigeria.

The evolution of Nigeria's anti-corruption architecture is a chronicle of reactive legislation, where each new law or agency was created in response to increasingly sophisticated modes of systemic graft. Examining the path of these institutions and the specific legal milestones that have shaped them is necessary to understand why AI is now essential.

The ICPC and EFCC were the beginnings of specialised enforcement.

For years, corruption was dealt with in accordance with the general provisions of the Criminal Code and the Penal Code. However, the return to democracy in 1999 necessitated specialised frameworks to address the 'Corruption Gaps' created by manual processes and human interference.

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) was established by the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000. It was designed to combat administrative corruption within the public sector. System reviews and the prosecution of bribery and gratification are the focus of its mandate. Despite its purpose, the ICPC's reliance on manual reporting often resulted in delayed investigations, which could now be addressed by AI-driven Natural Language Processing (NLP) through scanning administrative records for anomalies.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established in 2003 (as amended in 2004) largely due to international pressure from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). It became the spearhead for fighting grand corruption. Despite obtaining high-profile convictions, the EFCC frequently encounters human interference and an overwhelming amount of financial data. By switching to AI-driven predictive analytics, the EFCC would be able to stop chasing laundered funds and intercept them in real time.

The Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) is part of the constitutional guard.

The CCB is Nigeria's oldest anti-corruption agency, established under the 5th Schedule of the 1999 Constitution. Its primary weapon is the Asset Declaration mandate, which requires public officers to submit a comprehensive list of their assets and liabilities.

Traditionally, the CCB has struggled with manually verifying these declarations. Many declarations remain unverified for years due to the lack of automated cross-referencing against bank records (BVN) or land registries. By using artificial intelligence, this verification can be automated, highlighting discrepancies between a public officer's declared income and their actual beneficial ownership of assets.

The Advance Fee Fraud Act

Before cybercrime became a common term, Nigeria had to deal with the scourge of '419' scams through the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act. The purpose of this law was to prohibit the use of telecommunications and postal services in the solicitation of illegal funds. As these crimes transitioned from physical letters to sophisticated digital phishing, the manual methods used in the early 2000s became obsolete. Modern financial intelligence now requires AI-driven detection of 'red flags' to monitor suspicious transactions that bypass traditional banking oversight, which is a direct evolution from the early enforcement of the Advance Fee Fraud Act.

The Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015

The ACJA 2015 was a watershed moment in the Nigerian legal landscape, aimed at ending the 'stay of proceedings' and other dilatory tactics used by defendants in corruption cases.

The Act brought about daily trials and stringent time limits for criminal litigation.

While the ACJA 2015 optimised the process, it did not fully consider the nature of evidence in the age of artificial intelligence. As Nigerian courts begin to deal with the Evidence Act regarding the admission of digital data, the ACJA provides the procedural framework for AI-generated forensic evidence to ensure a fair and speedy trial.

Identifying the Persistent "Corruption Gaps"

Despite the robust institutional evolution, three primary gaps remain that can only be bridged by a technological shift.

- 1) The heavy reliance on paper-based documentation makes it easy for critical evidence to be lost or suppressed.
- 2) Discretionary powers within these agencies often lead to selective enforcement.
- 3) The "siloes" nature of the EFCC, ICPC, and CCB means that a corrupt official can hide assets in plain sight across different agency jurisdictions.

Nigeria can overcome the limitations of these historical frameworks by incorporating AI, using 'Algorithmic Accountability' to reduce human discretion and automate the path to integrity.

The Theoretical Framework: AI as a Tool for Transparency.

1. Determining how AI can be used for governance.

For the purpose of anti-corruption, AI is not a single entity but a suite of technologies.

Machine learning (ML) is used to detect anomalies in financial transactions that deviate from established patterns.

Natural Language Processing (NLP) is vital for scanning thousands of procurement documents to find hidden links between bidders.

Historical data is used to assess the probability of corruption in specific sectors by using predictive analytics.

2. Algorithmic Accountability Theory

According to this theory, the 'opportunity cost' of corruption increases when decision-making is shifted from high-discretion human actors to data-driven systems. When algorithms are designed correctly, they do not have 'friends' or 'political benefactors', which reduces the human discretion that typically fuels systemic graft.

3. Global Best Practices

Nigeria needs not reinvent the wheel. Comparative successes include:

An artificial intelligence called 'Rosie' is used in Brazil to analyse the spending of parliamentary deputies and expose suspicious claims.

The state has benefited from Ukraine's ProZorro, a digital system that flags non-competitive bidding in real time and saves billions.

4.0 Strategic Applications of AI in the Nigerian Context

1. Public Procurement and E-Contracting

Public procurement is the "ground zero" of grand corruption in Nigeria. AI-driven systems have the ability to monitor the entire lifecycle of a contract, highlighting red flags such as:

- a Patterns in bidding prices.
- b Common directors among supposedly competing firms
- c Contracts awarded to companies with no prior history in the sector.

2. Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering (AML)

Money laundering involves complex layers of transactions. AI is capable of mapping beneficial ownership and identifying the actual individuals behind shell companies by analysing data from the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and banking records in real time.

3. Asset Declaration and Monitoring

Currently, the CCB processes asset declarations manually. By integrating AI, an automated system could check the declarations of Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs) against the Bank Verification Number (BVN) and land registry data to detect undisclosed wealth.

4. AI-powered whistleblowing is a tool for citizen engagement.

Whistleblowing can be transformed by AI platforms that ensure total anonymity through encryption, and they can categorise and prioritise reports based on the quality of evidence provided.

5.0 Legal and Regulatory Considerations

1. The Existing Framework

AI must operate within the ambit of:

- a The Cybercrimes Act: Providing the Basis for Prosecuting Digital Malfeasance
- b The Data Protection Act 2023: Protecting the Privacy Rights of Nigerian Citizens
- c The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act: Ensuring that the public can access the data fed into AI systems.

2. The Need for New Legislation

Nigeria requires a dedicated AI Accountability Act to define the legal personality of AI and assign liability when algorithmic errors occur. Furthermore, the National AI Policy must be codified into law to provide a stable regulatory environment.

3. The Evidentiary Challenge

A significant hurdle is the Evidence Act. In order for AI-generated reports to be used for convictions, the legal system must establish clear guidelines for the admissibility of digital forensics and 'black box' outputs in Nigerian courts.

6.0 Ethical and Structural Challenges

1. The "Black Box" Problem

The lack of transparency in how some AI models reach conclusions poses a risk of bias and a challenge to the "fair hearing" provisions of the Nigerian Constitution.

2. Data Privacy versus Public Interest

The Nigerian Data Protection Commission (NDPC) needs to find a balance where the right to privacy is not a shield for corrupt individuals to hide illicit financial flows.

3. Both infrastructure and political will are necessary.

AI cannot function without:

Stable Electricity and Internet: The current "digital divide" must be closed.

The potential for AI to be used to attack political opponents rather than as a neutral tool for justice poses a significant risk to political stability.

7.0 Recommendations

Inter-Agency Data Integration: Synchronise the BVN, NIN, and CAC registries with AI filters to create a single source of truth.

The judiciary and investigators receive specialised training on digital evidence and algorithmic bias for capacity building.

Engaging the Yabacon Valley tech ecosystem in the development of locally relevant anti-corruption tools.

Creating an impartial body to examine government algorithms for fairness and accuracy.

8. Conclusion

The problem of corruption in Nigeria is a human one, but it requires a systematic and technological solution. Integrity can be automated by AI, making it hard for corruption to thrive in the shadow of manual processes. Urgent legislative reform and a genuine commitment to institutional transparency are crucial for the success of this transition. Nigeria must take immediate action to ensure that the Fourth Industrial Revolution becomes the definitive revolution against systemic corruption.

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