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The Corruption Formula: Possibilities of Corruption in Government Service Delivery in Liberia

Abstract
Corruption in government services has become a relevant topic of study. This study examines the possibility of corruption in Liberian government services. Previous analyses are still limited to identifying the specific possibilities driving corruption in government services in developing countries. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach guided by the Corruption Formula theory across three indicators: monopoly of power (M), discretion by officials (D), and lack of accountability (A), expressed as C=M+D-A. PPrimary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants. Secondary data were collected from documentation, journals, newspapers, etc., and analyzed using NVIVO 12 Plus software. The findings revealed the following: (1) service providers have a high monopoly over services, as they often use their dominant positions for personal gain; (2) there is a lot of discretion by officials, giving them the freedom to manipulate systems and engage in illicit activities without clear oversight; and (3) there is limited accountability to hold individuals and institutions answerable for their actions, as officials constantly engage in wrongdoings without facing legal consequences. This study closes the gap in understanding corruption in government services with evidence from Liberia, emphasizing the need for policymakers to enhance the integrity of public services.

Keywords:
government services; impunity; Liberia; corruption

Introduction

Corruption in government services has become a relevant topic of study, especially in developing countries with high levels of public corruption. Corruption in government services is defined as the misuse of public power for private gain through bribery, fraud, embezzlement, or nepotism (Ionescu et al., 2012). This type of corruption usually occurs between service providers and

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services, and includes nepotism, cronyism, and negative patronage due to the lack of regulations (Gross et al., and Ogunseye 2024). This happens when government service providers demand bribes from citizens for illegal transactions, prioritizing self-interest over public welfare and hindering effective service provisions (Amakoh and Bloh 2023). Corruption in government services is a critical issue affecting governance and public service delivery worldwide, particularly in developing countries, where weak institutions and accountability systems exacerbate this problem.

It is painful to be told your country is corrupt—worse still, your culture even approves of corruption (Klitgaard, 2017). This is the case in Liberia, where corruption has established itself as a custom that affects all aspects of the country (Gross et al. 2024). After the civil war in 2003, Liberia struggled to build strong institutions and corruption was a significant obstacle. Government officials often misuse public funds and bribes are common in everyday transactions (Lee-Jones et al., 2019). Many citizens feel that they cannot rely on their leaders to act in their best interests (Sungbeh 2017). Based on Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index data, Liberia is the worst decline in Sub-Saharan Africa with a score of 25 alongside Mali (28), and Gabon (28). This widespread corruption means that basic services, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, suffer greatly. Based on data from the Center for Transparency and Accountability (CENTAL, 2023), police services are the most corrupt, followed by medical, court, and educational services. The government services most prone to corruption in Liberia are shown in Figure 1.

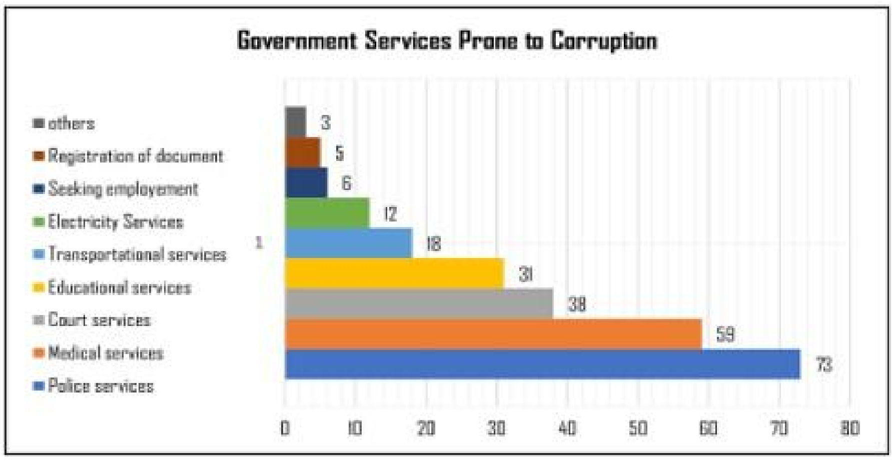

Figure 1. Government services prone to corruption in Liberia

Source: Centre for Transparency and Accountability, (C. for T. and A. CENTAL 2023)

Based on the data above, it can be seen the majority of government services in Liberia are highly prone to corruption. As shown in the data,

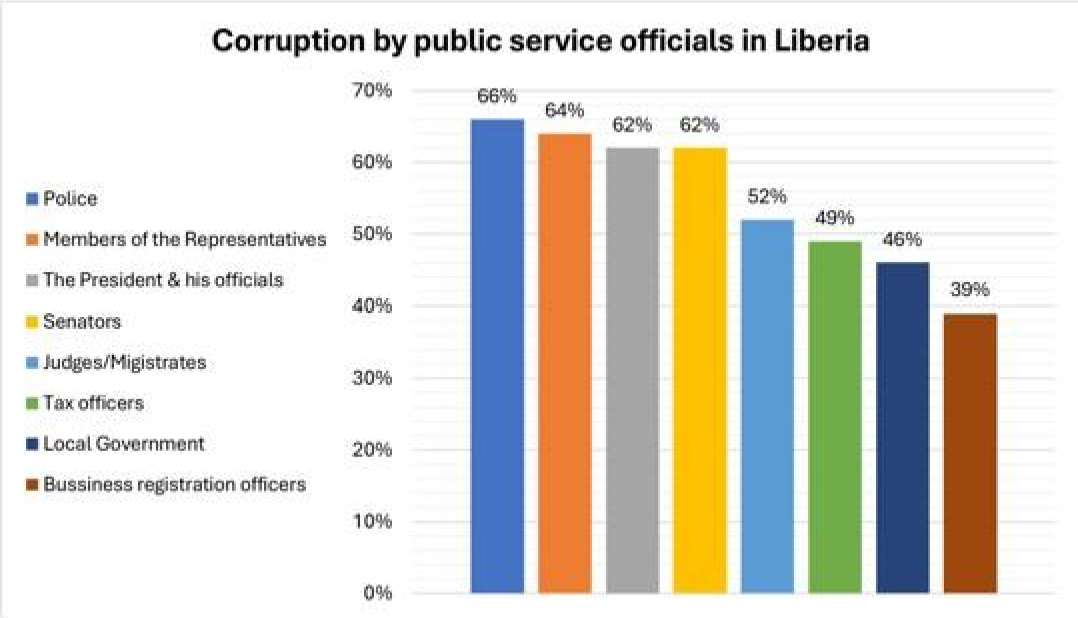

Figure 2. Corruption by public service officials in Liberia

Source: Afrobarometer (2023)

police services were rated the highest at 73%, followed by medical services at 59%. Further, court services were rated at 38% and educational services at 31%. Transportation services were rated at 18%, electricity services at 12%, and other services at 3%. These data are supported by a survey report from Afrobarometer conducted in 2023, indicating a high level of public corruption among officials offering public services at these institutions (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 demonstrates that citizens perceived the police as the most corrupt in first place at 66%, followed by the House of Representatives (64%), the President and the executives (62%), the House of Senate (62%), and judges/magistrates (52%). According to CENTAL (2023), this high level of corruption in public services (Figure 1) by public officials or officers (Figure 2) is due to several factors, including lack of prosecution, rampant allegations, lack of transparency, and a culture of impunity. The Corruption Formula proposed by Robert Klitgaard states that this kind of corruption occurs when public service providers have monopoly power over services (M), have discretion, can decide who to receive the service and how much to pay (D), and are not accountable (A), mathematically expressed as $C = M + D - A$. In the context of public service delivery in Liberia, the corruption formula is evident because an environment has been created where unethical behavior goes unpunished, enabling officials to misuse their authority and resources without fear of consequences (Afrobarometer 2023)**.** For instance, citizens have frequently reported that police officers demand bribes to process cases, extort money during traffic stops, and charge services that should be free (Koinyeneh 2025). Similarly, health workers usually charge illegal fees for medical services, divert medical supplies to private clinics and stores, and demand that patients buy medical supplies, such as drugs, at their private clinics and stores (Jaivey 2025). Likewise, in court services, there have been reports of judges seeking bribes to influence case outcomes, delay proceedings to extort money, and favor those with connections (Peters 2023). Moreover, citizens believe that justice in Liberia is available only to those who can afford to pay (CENTAL 2023). These corrupt practices continue because service providers hold monopoly power

(M), exercise broad discretion (D), and face little accountability (A) to the public. Importantly, this study addresses Liberia's critical problem, which can inform targeted anti-corruption strategies, potentially improving public trust and service delivery.

In recent years, studies of corruption in government services have revealed various forms of malpractice and their underlying causes across different contexts. For example, Joshi and Dangal (2023) research in Nepal demonstrated that receiving assistance in service delivery increases the likelihood of bribes, especially when citizens must make repeated visits to public offices. Ejue (2014) analyzed this through a principal-agent framework, where public servants (agents) misuse their privileged access to resources and information, leading to poor public service delivery and a lack of citizen confidence. Similarly, Eke (2016) attributed this to weak institutional structures, complex administrative procedures, and negative attitudes among civil servants that undermine effective service delivery. However, corruption manifests differently depending on socioeconomic and political contexts. In Southeast Asia, for instance, studies have identified informal payments, low salaries, poor governance, and weak incentives as common factors driving bribery in public services (Habibov, Fan, and Auchynnikava 2019; Naher et al. 2020; Yunan and Andini 2018). In post-communist countries, the issue extends to the deep-rooted mistrust of civil servants who are perceived as corrupt and often engage in bribery and extortion (Bui et al. 2021; Sadik-Zada, Gatto, and Niftiyev 2022; Wahed 2018). Research in developing countries has pointed to ethical violations in civil services and high political, economic, and societal corruption levels (Addo 2021; Bolatito 2023; Desta 2019). This has negative consequences including stunted economic growth, social injustice, and political instability.

Specifically, in Liberia, studies have found that corruption in government services is persistent due to weak moral values, a lack of accountability, and detrimental impacts on economic development, public trust, and the delivery of essential (Josephine R. Boakai and Phon 2020; Kromah 2015; Nebo Sr. 2023; Sungbeh 2017). Despite extensive research on the factors driving corruption, few studies have systematically analyzed the specific possibilities or mechanisms through which corruption occurs, particularly in government services. This gap is particularly evident in Liberia, where few studies have systematically analyzed these possibilities (Kromah et al. 2023). Therefore, this study addresses the question of how likely corruption is to occur within government services in Liberia. This question must be answered, because understanding the likelihood of corruption is crucial for developing targeted anti-corruption strategies. The novelty of this study is the application of Klitgaard's Corruption Formula, which allows for a more systematic assessment of the specific conditions that enable corruption in Liberia's government services. This lack of understanding can hinder the precision of reform efforts, making it challenging to reduce corruption and establish a more transparent and accountable government.

This study seeks to address the persistent issue of corruption in Liberia's government services by analyzing the factors that create opportunities for corruption. This study analyzes corruption across all government services rather than focusing on specific sectors. This was done to capture the general patterns of corruption in government service delivery and identify specific vulnerabilities. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section covers the research methodology, followed by an analysis of the results based on Klitgaard's Corruption Formula. The conclusion summarizes the findings and offers policy recommendations for combating corruption in Liberian government services.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method with a case study approach to explore the specific conditions and possibilities that create opportunities for corruption in Liberian government services. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative method is essential for understanding and interpreting social realities and meanings of phenomena in their natural settings. The case study approach, as described by Byrd, (2020) investigates a contemporary issue (the "case") in depth within its real-world context. In this study, the public service delivery process is generally viewed as the focus of this case. Public service delivery was chosen because it is identified as one of the most prone forms of corruption in Liberia, with citizens frequently reporting incidents of bribery, extortion, and favoritism in obtaining public services (Hammarberg et. al., 2016). However, our findings do not represent the conditions or processes of corruption in specific institutions in Liberia because this research is based on the general view of the public service delivery process, which highlights the vulnerabilities of the entire sector.

This study used primary and secondary data collection techniques for data sources. Primary data were collected from in-depth interviews with ten key informants who were interested in discussing sensitive topics of corruption in public service delivery. The informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering their level of experience and familiarity with corruption issues, to provide valuable insights into the research theme based on expertise (Andrade, 2021), which included government officials (3), anti-corruption activists (2), academicians/ researchers (1), civil society representatives (2), and media representatives (2). The interview questions were semi-structured and were guided by the theory, indicators, and parameters used in this study. The interview results from all informants were compared. This was done to ensure that every conclusion in this study could be justified and had a high degree of validity. To complement the primary data, secondary data were collected from documentation and related published studies from reputable sources (Cheong et al. 2023). Fifty newspapers were collected from reputable news media in Liberia: FrontPage Africa (18), New Dawn (10), New Republic Liberia (15), and The Independent Probe Newspaper (7). In addition, secondary data were obtained from the Center for Transparency and Accountability (CENTAL) State of Corruption Report 2023, Afrobarometer 2023 Reports, World Bank and UN reports, documents from the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, the General Auditing Commission, 25 latest scientific journals relevant to this research, press statements, official and unofficial government documents, and other reports.

The data analysis in this study was carried out using an interactive model because of its suitability for providing in-depth and valid qualitative data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The interactive model is shown in figure below.

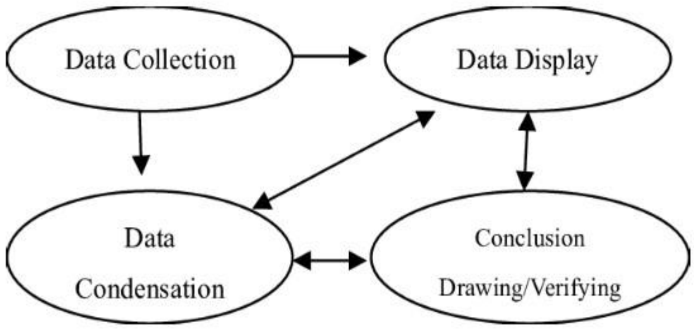

Figure 3. Interactive Analysis Model for Qualitative Data

Source: Miles et al., (2014)

As shown in Figure 3, the analysis processes occurred in three different time phases: before data collection, during data collection as interim and early analyses were carried out, and after data collection, the final products were approached and completed. In this regard, the data analysis in this study started with primary and secondary data collection from the transcripts of interviews, newspapers, academic literature, and reports. The data were then taken to the second stage of the model – data reduction–to help bring the masses of data into more manageable proportions, making them easier to work with. This was done by coding the data into specific themes and patterns based on research theory using the NVivo 12plus software through crosstab analysis. In the next stage, data display and coded data from NVivo were then visualized in the form of figures to organize and summarize the data appropriately for further analysis. In addition, some of the coded data were transferred to MS Excel for graphical display. Finally, after reducing and displaying the data, the researchers drew and verified valid conclusions through interpretation of the displayed data. At this stage, ethics were considered.

Results and Discussion

The Corruption Formula and Corruption in Government Services in Liberia

This study uses Klitgaard's corruption theory or the corruption formula as its theoretical foundation. Unlike other corruption theories (e.g., institutional theory, collective action theory, principal-agent theory), Klitgaard's corruption theory is the most suitable for uncovering the possibilities at which corruption occurs in organizations (private or public), which is the theme of this research. The theory posits that corruption is possible when an institution or individual has monopoly power over a good or service, can decide who will receive it, and how much that person will get, and is not accountable, expressed as C = M + D – A. The corruption formula consists of three indicators: First, the monopoly of power (M) refers to the concentration of

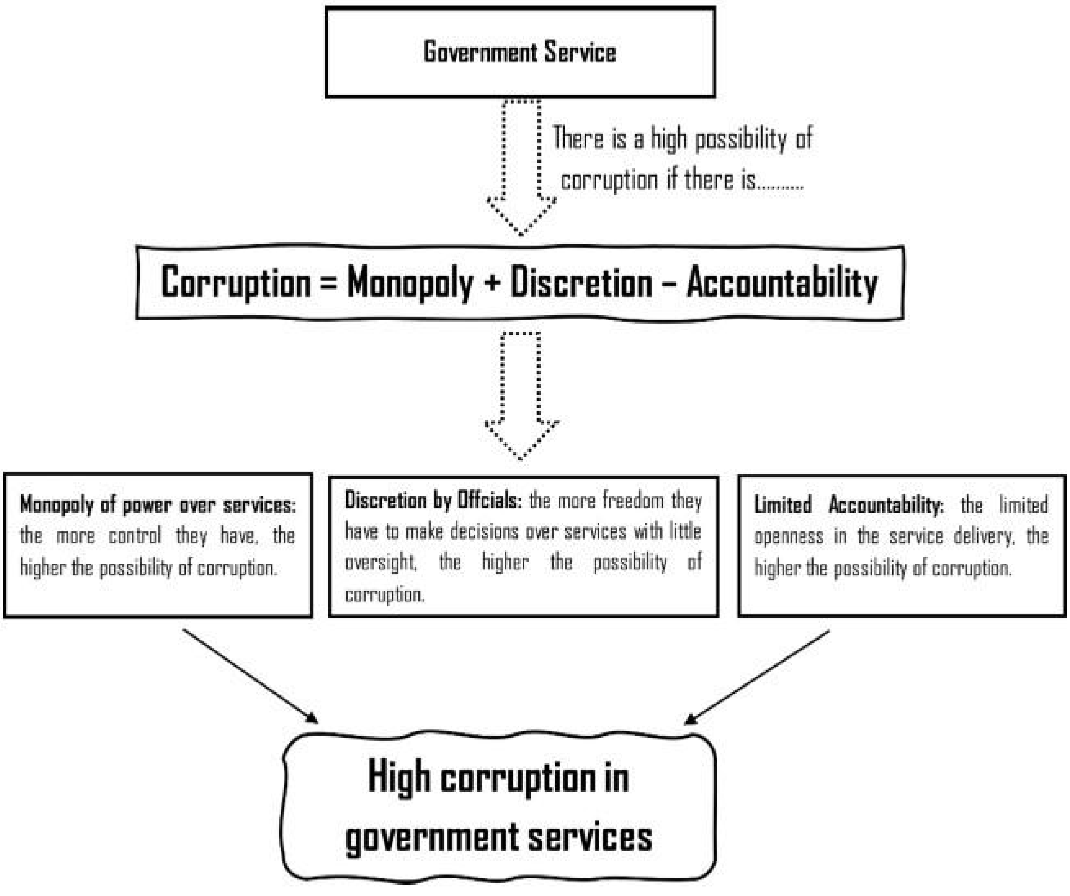

Figure 4. The Corruption Formula in Government Services in Liberia

Source: Klitgaard, (2017)

authority or resources of services in the hands of a single entity or individual, enabling it to control decisions and outcomes. The second indicator is discretion, which signifies the freedom or authority to make decisions based on personal judgment, rather than explicit rules or guidelines. The final indicator is limited accountability, which implies a lack of responsibility or answerability for one's actions, fostering an environment where corrupt behavior can go unchecked. A description of the corruption formula and the possibilities of corruption in government services in Liberia are shown in Figure 4.

Based on the data presented in Figure 4, it is evident that the corruption formula is highly applicable for identifying potential corruption in government services as demonstrated by previous studies (Ceschel et al., 2022; Ratmono et al., 2021)The research will employ the three indicators of Robert Klitgaard's corruption formula, which include the monopoly of power, discretion by officials, and limited accountability. These indicators align perfectly with the research objectives, aiming to delve into the factors that contribute to the likelihood of corruption in government services in Liberia. Using these parameters, this study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these factors play an important role in fostering corruption.

Monopoly of Power in Government Services

According to Klitgaard (2017), the first indicator within the corruption formula is the monopoly of power over services, which can be assessed by the control a person or institution has over a service or good. In this case, the more control they have, the higher the possibility of corruption, because they can manipulate the system for their benefit. This monopoly can create environments in which individuals or institutions can exploit their dominant positions for personal gain, leading to unfair advantages and distorted

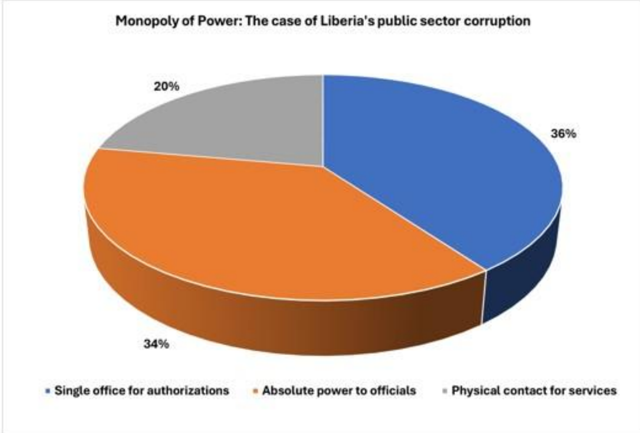

Figure 5. The monopoly of power over government services in Liberia
Source: Processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus

outcomes (Klitgaard, 2017). This research aims to examine the monopoly of power over government services in Liberia through three parameters: absolute power to officials, a single office for authorizations, and physical contact for services. Therefore, to determine this, the researchers carried out a crosstab analysis of NVIVO12 PLUS by inspecting the different ways monopoly over government services exists in Liberia, as shown in Figure 5.

Based on the above analysis results, it can be seen that a single office for authorizations achieved the highest percentage (36 %), referring to centralized points where authorizations and approvals are processed, which can become hotspots for corrupt activities if not properly monitored. It has been found that most public services, if not all, are only accessible at single offices in the capital, Monrovia (Bamba Jr. 2022). This single point of the authorization system in Liberia has increased the potential for officials to exploit their position for personal gain, often resulting in delays, favoritism, and an increased burden on citizens using these single offices (Wang et al., 2013). Despite decentralization efforts such as the Local Government Act requiring some services to be authorized at the county level, citizens are compelled to travel to various ministry headquarters in Monrovia to obtain basic services such as birth certificates, vehicle driver licenses, and land deeds (Geply and Stephens 2024). For instance, corruption in obtaining building permits has spread in Liberia, as the central office often demands unofficial payments from contractors to approve construction projects (Chene, 2012). Furthermore, several reports in Liberia have indicated that the Ministry of Transport responsible for vehicle registration often demands bribes to process documents promptly (Author 2021). Similarly, several reports have also revealed that the National Port Authority (NPA) responsible for handling import/export licenses usually solicit bribes from businesses to speed up the approval process (Tingba 2021). In addition, the Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC) has been implicated in corruption scandals, as officials award contracts in exchange for kickbacks (Dodoo, 2020).

The absolute power granted to officials reached 34%, which reflects situations in which government officials have unchecked authority, allowing them to make decisions without proper oversight or accountability. This lack of control fosters environments in which corruption can thrive, as officials are empowered to manipulate systems for personal gain (Ratmono et al. 2021). They can demand bribes, engage in nepotism, and alter procedures without facing repercussions, leading to significant inefficiency and an increase in corrupt activities (Dodoo 2023). Jones (2022) stated that when officials operate in an environment with unchecked power, the likelihood of corrupt practices rises dramatically. Therefore, the absence of accountability mechanisms creates opportunities for self-serving behavior, eroding trust in public institutions and contributing to systemic inefficiencies (Alam et al. 2023). For instance, a report by Afrobarometer (2023) highlighted that officials in Liberia's land administration offices exercised absolute discretion in land allocation. This often results in corrupt practices, such as land grabbing and extortion, where citizens are either coerced into paying bribes or are unfairly stripped of their land rights. The same pattern is evident in the National Port Authority, where officials leverage their unchecked power to demand bribes for the swift release of goods, creating delays and imposing additional costs on businesses (Author 2023). Moreover, in 2023, the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission indicted 12 health officials in Margibi County for misappropriating funds intended for medical supplies and services (Jipoh 2023). According to the reports, these officials exploited their authoritative positions to divert the resources meant for public use into their accounts, a common outcome in systems where absolute power prevails. This finding resonates with the understanding that corruption flourishes when there is minimal transparency and oversight (Paper and Ara, 2016; Tsutskiridze and Bereza, 2020), underscoring the importance of implementing robust accountability measures to curb such practices. These examples reaffirm that unchecked authority in public administration is a major driver of corruption, thus highlighting the need for structural reforms in governance systems.

Finally, physical contact with services accounted for 29%, which highlights the need for individuals to engage in face-to-face interactions with officials to access essential public services. These direct interactions create opportunities for corrupt practices to flourish, as service users are often pressured into paying bribes or providing favours in exchange for expedited service delivery (Artello and Albanese 2022). This often leads to delays, discrimination, and inflated costs, which disproportionately affect those with fewer resources. The prevalence of corruption can be traced back to Liberia's inefficient digital infrastructure, which forces citizens to rely on in-person visits rather than digital solutions. According to the 2023 UN E-Government Development Index (EDGI), Liberia ranks 177th globally, with a score of 0.2905—significantly below the Sub-Saharan African regional average of 0.4054. This low score reflects poor technological capacity and limited digital platforms, which are critical for promoting access to public services and ensuring the inclusion of the population in governance processes. As a result, Liberia's weak digital infrastructure has become a facilitator of corruption, necessitating physical contact with government officials. For example, passport applicants are required to visit the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). During these visits, officials frequently demand additional fees for expedited processing, creating an environment in which citizens must pay bribes to receive timely services (Clayeh and Dunbar, 2019). Similarly, business licensing has been identified as another area prone to corruption, where entrepreneurs are compelled to make multiple visits to various offices each time being solicited for bribes to move the process forward (A. Afrobarometer 2023). Moreover, customers of public utilities, such as the Liberian Water and Sewer Corporation and the Liberian Electricity Corporation (LEC), also experience corruption during in-person visits. For example, when individuals seek to resolve issues or set up utilities such as water and electricity, they are often asked for "facilitation fees" to ensure that their requests are processed efficiently (Genoway 2019). This widespread need for physical contact to access services exacerbates corruption, emphasizing the urgent need for Liberia to invest in digital infrastructure to reduce face-to-face interactions and curb corrupt practices.

Discretion by officials in government services

The second indicator is discretion by officials, which refers to the freedom an official or institution has to make decisions regarding service provision. When officials or institutions have significant discretion paired with minimal oversight, they are more likely to engage in corrupt activities (Klitgaard 2017). This unchecked discretion enables individuals and organizations to exploit situations, bend regulations, and partake in illicit behavior without facing adequate scrutiny, thus increasing the likelihood of corruption (Pinandito, 2022). This section of the study seeks to analyze the discretion exercised by government service officials by examining three specific parameters: personal contact for services, weak control against corrupt offenders, and lack of transparency in service provision. To explore these factors, researchers conducted a crosstab analysis using NVIVO12 PLUS, focusing on these parameters, as presented in Figure 6. This method illustrates the extent to which discretion contributes to corrupt practices.

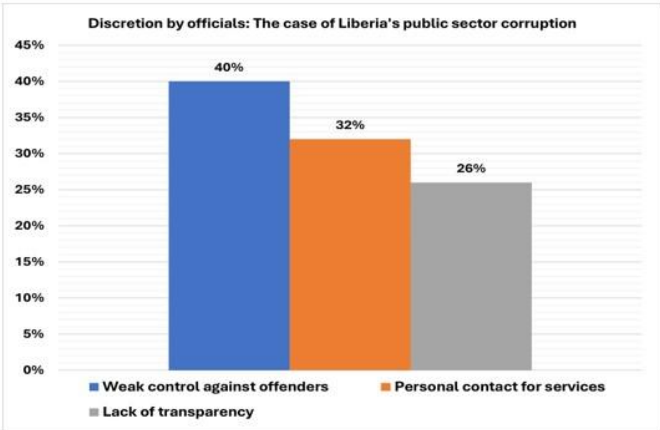

Figure 6. Discretion by officials in government services in Liberia

Source: Processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus

Based on the results shown above, it can be explained that officials have much discretion (freedom) in deciding on services with little or no oversight leading to a high possibility of corruption. First, it is clear that weak control against corrupt offenders achieved the highest percentage at 40% due to inadequate enforcement of laws and regulations against corrupt practices, as corrupt officials face little to no consequences, encouraging continued and widespread corruption, leading to systemic inefficiencies, increased public cynicism, and a culture of impunity. The governments of Liberia and anti-corruption bodies are compromised and ineffective in prosecuting high-profile corruption cases. In 2022, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) reported the mismanagement of one million United States dollars ($1.1 million) by the Ministry of Health and indicted 12 officials (Editor 2024). In the same year, top government officials, namely, Nathaniel McGill, former Minister of State), Syrenius Cephus (Solicitor General), and Bill Twehway (Director of the National Port Authority) were sanctioned by the U.S. Government for their involvement in public corruption, mainly bribery, kickbacks, conflicts of interest, and the manipulation of public procurement processes (Treasury 2022). To date, no action has been taken against these officials. This has also been extended to lower governance levels. Koinyeneh and Fania (2024) reported that customs officers at various immigration checkpoints involved in smuggling and bribery activities faced no consequences, allowing such practices to expand.

Second, personal contact with services emerges as the second-highest factor, reaching 32%, largely due to the necessity for individuals to interact directly with officials to access services, which creates opportunities for corrupt practices. According to Mabeba (2021), these direct interactions often lead to demand for bribes or other corrupt exchanges to expedite or guarantee service delivery. This dynamic not only undermines the fairness and integrity of the system, but also contributes to inequities, delays, and additional costs for service users, perpetuating a deeply ingrained culture of corruption. These corrupt interactions are especially evident when citizens engage with service providers through personal connections, such as family members, friends, relatives, or even pay agents, all of which can further increase opportunities for favoritism or exploitation (Marie, 2021). Based on reports from Afrobarometer (2023), medical services in Liberia are particularly vulnerable to corruption, as patients who need direct interaction with healthcare providers are often asked for bribes to receive timely and adequate treatment. This situation not only hinders equal access to essential services, but also risks lives, as delays in treatment can have serious consequences. Similarly, in the education sector, students and parents who need to deal directly with school administrators for admissions, grades, or services frequently face requests for bribes, further exacerbating social inequality and limiting access to quality education (Bestman, 2021). Additionally, beneficiaries of social services are routinely asked for bribes during direct interactions with service providers to access essential benefits or support, thus aggravating the plight of the most vulnerable populations (Koinyeneh 2023). This growing trend of personal contact-based corruption highlights the urgent need for reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and reducing opportunities for direct and discretionary exchanges.

Finally, the lack of transparency parameter reached 26%, emphasizing the absence of openness and clarity in government processes and decision-making. Transparency is crucial for public trust and accountability, and when lacking, it provides fertile ground for corruption. Chene (2022) suggested that a lack of transparency enables officials to operate in shadows, engaging in corrupt activities without fear of detection. This undermines public confidence and makes it difficult to hold individuals accountable for resource mismanagement. The result is the erosion of trust in public institutions, as citizens perceive corruption as being conducted unchecked. The findings from Afrobarometer (2023) reinforce this point, as it revealed that nine out of ten Liberians do not trust their government institutions, largely because of the opacity in how services are provided and decisions are made. One case in point is Liberia's Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC), which has been accused of awarding contracts without public tenders or clearly defined criteria. The absence of transparent procedures in these processes has fueled suspicions of favoritism, bribery, and backdoor deals, further diminishing public confidence in the system (Reporter 2020). Studies on governance and transparency have highlighted the importance of public accountability in limiting corruption (Bereziuk 2018; Oladeji 2023). When transparency mechanisms are weak or absent, as is the case with the PPCC or Liberia's national budget processes, there is little opportunity for public scrutiny. Organizations such as BudgiT Liberia have consistently pointed out the lack of transparency in how Liberia allocates and spends its national budget, making it difficult for citizens and oversight bodies to track potential misappropriations (BudgiT, 2023). This shows how opaque financial management systems create environments in which corruption can thrive. Additionally, Liberia's failure to adopt digital governance practices has exacerbated this problem. It has been found that many public institutions in the country do not have functional websites, and the absence of published audit reports on government spending further reduces the oversight that could otherwise prevent corrupt practices (Signé and Korha 2016). Evidence from studies on e-government (Li, Wei, and Ma 2021; Nambassa 2024; Rustiarini 2019; Tsutskiridze and Bereza 2020) have found that countries with robust digital platforms tend to have lower levels of corruption due to increased transparency and public access to information.

Limited accountability in government services

Finally, the third component of the corruption formula is the public officials' lack of accountability. According to Klitgaard (2017), a lack of accountability in services allows corrupt practices to go unchecked, further increasing the possibility of corruption. Further, the absence of mechanisms that hold individuals or institutions answerable for their actions can foster a culture of impunity (Soldatenko, 2023). This section of the research will inspect the third component of the corruption formula in government services in Liberia by examining the legal frameworks for accountability, culture of impunity, patronage, and nepotism. To determine this, the researchers carried out a crosstab analysis of NVIVO12 PLUS by inspecting how a lack of accountability increases the possibility of corruption in government services in Liberia, as shown in Figure 7.

Based on the results in Figure 7, it is evident that corrupt individuals and institutions are often not held accountable for their actions, significantly contributing to the persistence of corruption in

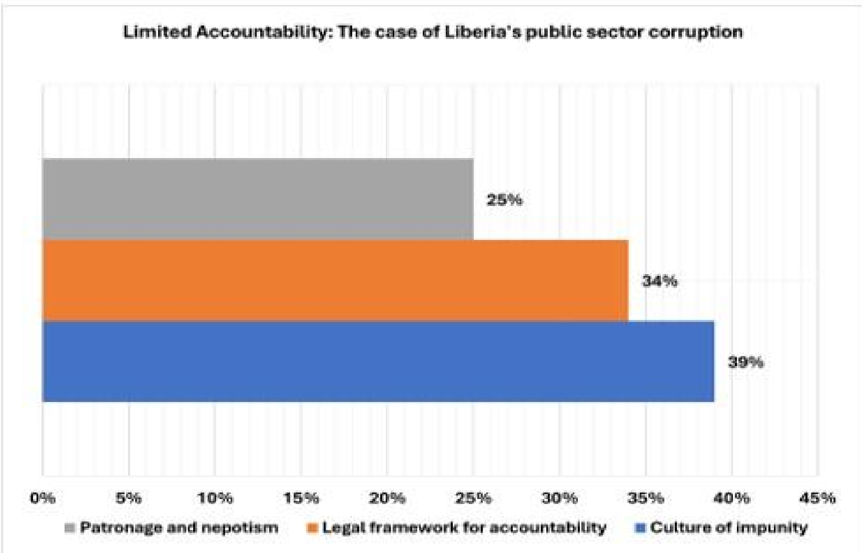

Figure 7. Lack of accountability in government services in Liberia
Source: Processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus

government services in Liberia (Marie 2021). First, the parameter of impunity stands out as the most significant at 39%, highlighting how individuals continuously engage in corrupt activities without facing legal consequences. This has been proven by Wang et al. (2013), who argued that when officials are confident they will not face repercussions for corrupt practices, corruption becomes deeply entrenched and harder to eliminate. This not only undermines public trust in government institutions, but also demoralizes honest officials who may feel powerless to effect change in such a permissive environment (Indiahono 2021). In Liberia, the culture of impunity is reinforced by a lack of political will to prosecute high-profile corruption cases, even when they are publicly exposed. For instance, Lomo (2023) points out that cases of embezzlement involving senior government officials are rarely followed through full prosecution, if at all. A glaring example is the recent sanctions imposed by the U.S. Treasury on three high-ranking Liberian officials: Nathaniel McGill, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs; Sayma Syrenius Cephus, the Solicitor General and Chief Prosecutor of Liberia; and Bill Twehway, Managing Director of the National Port Authority. These officials were sanctioned for bribery and the embezzlement of state funds, but despite the gravity of these accusations, the Liberian government has demonstrated little political will to prosecute them (Karweye, 2022). This lack of accountability sends a dangerous message to other public officials, signalling that they can engage in corrupt activities without fear of consequences. The culture of impunity extends beyond high-ranking officials. Many government employees at various levels, including those involved in bribery and extortion, continue to operate freely, without fear of prosecution. For instance, Dodoo (2020) documented cases in which judges accepted bribes to influence verdicts, yet these officials remained in their positions without facing legal action. This widespread impunity not only perpetuates the cycle of corruption but also fosters a sense of resignation among the public who see little chance of justice being served. This is proven by previous literature on corruption, which consistently shows that impunity is a key driver of corruption in many developing countries (Alam et al. 2023; Artello and Albanese 2022; Khan, Krishnan, and Dhir 2021). The lack of prosecution creates an environment in which corrupt practices are normalized and reform efforts are easily undermined.

Second, the lack of a comprehensive legal framework for accountability contributes significantly to corruption in Liberia, with 34% of the respondents highlighting this issue. This high percentage underscores the fact that Liberia lacks the robust legal structures necessary to effectively combat corruption and prosecute officials. Although anti-corruption laws and institutions exist, they are often influenced by political interference and weak enforcement, which leads to minimal accountability. For instance, Boakai and Phon (2020) stated that while institutions such as the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) are in place, their powers are limited to financial mismanagement disclosure and asset declarations without the authority to prosecute offenders. This limitation undermines the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts, and enables corrupt officials to evade justice. Furthermore, Liberia's legal framework for public procurement, although seemingly strong, is affected by a lack of enforcement and limited transparency. Legal provisions exist for transparent procurement processes such as public access to procurement information (plans, bidding opportunities, contract awards, and data on the resolution of procurement complaints). However, Kukutschka (2013) points out that there are significant gaps in the availability of this information, making it difficult to monitor procurement practices. The Public Procurement Act mandates the publishing of procurement plans by key ministries, including finance, public works, health and social welfare, education, and internal affairs. However, these requirements have never happened systematically, leaving room for corrupt practices such as bid rigging, favoritism, and the embezzlement of funds (Chene 2012). Additionally, the lack of legal protection for whistleblowers exacerbates corruption. In Liberia, whistleblowers who engage in corrupt activities often face severe repercussions, including job loss, harassment, or even death threats. Further, Wea (2023) emphasized that without proper legal safeguards, individuals who attempt to expose wrongdoing within government institutions are left vulnerable to retaliation. This discourages potential whistleblowers from coming forward, allowing corrupt practices to remain unchecked. The absence of a whistleblower protection law reflects a significant gap in Liberia's legal framework and represents a barrier to increasing accountability and transparency in government services. Other studies have argued that, without a robust legal framework and proper enforcement mechanisms, anti-corruption efforts will remain largely symbolic (Khan et al. 2021; Kobets 2021; Tsutskiridze and Bereza 2020). The inability of Liberia's legal system to ensure transparency, protect whistleblowers, and hold corrupt officials accountable has created an environment in which corruption has thrived. These findings support the notion that legal reforms, coupled with political will, are crucial in establishing a more transparent and accountable governance system (Jones, 2022), which is essential for breaking the cycle of corruption and restoring public trust in government institutions.

Lastly, the parameters of patronage and nepotism (25%) emerged as significant contributors to corruption in Liberia. Patronage and nepotism, in which government officials favor friends, relatives, or loyal political supporters for key positions, continue to erode meritocracy and efficiency in government services. This practice leads to the appointment of individuals based on personal connections, rather than competence or qualifications, resulting in inefficiency, diminished productivity, and a culture of entitlement. Bamba (2022) noted that, despite periodic changes in government every six years, the cycle of patronage and nepotism remains persistent, contributing to a lack of progress in improving governance and public service delivery. Documentation from Koinyeneh and Fania (2024) reveals that political loyalty has demoralized merit-based system appointments in Liberia, with key government positions filled by individuals who are relatives or close allies of powerful officials. This practice has weakened the government's ability to operate effectively, as unqualified individuals are placed in roles where their lack of expertise hinders their overall performance. Further, reports from Afrobarometer (2023) highlight that civil service positions in Liberia are frequently awarded to those with personal connections, which has undermined the recruitment of skilled professionals and discouraged qualified individuals from entering public service. Moreover, the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) has documented cases of patronage and nepotism in public procurement processes, where top officials award contracts to companies linked to their family members. This undermines fair competition and transparency, creating an environment ripe for corruption (Marie, 2021). Previous studies have revealed that patronage networks enable decisions to be made based on personal relationships rather than the best interests of the country (Bereziuk 2018), contributing to the mismanagement of resources and inefficiencies (Peters and Bianchi 2020) and furthering the cycle of corruption in Liberia.

Application and Validation

The analysis conducted in this study found that the *Corruption Formula* $(C = M + D - A)$ is applicable and valid in public service delivery in Liberia, confirming a conducive environment and high risk of corruption. To further confirm the

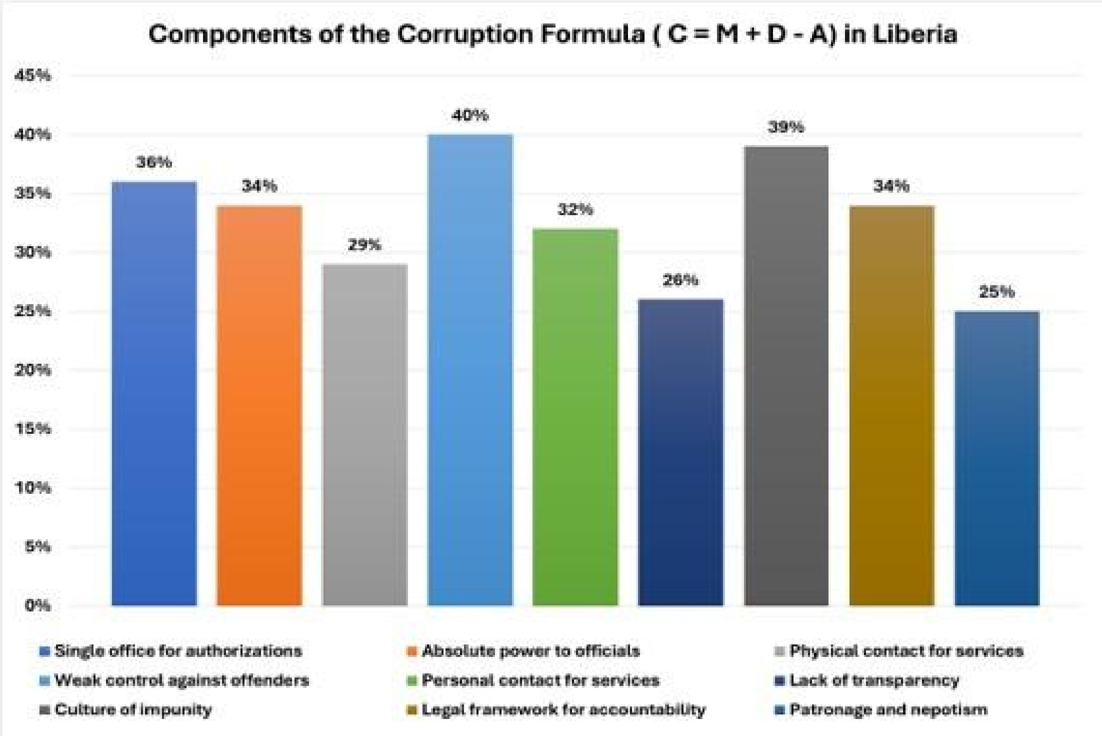

Figure 8. Indexes of Corruption Risks in Public Service Delivery in Liberia
Source: Processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus

validity of the formula, the researchers thoroughly and comparatively analyzed the components of the Corruption Formula examined in this study. This was done to identify the key factors that created the highest possibility of corruption in public service delivery in Liberia. The index analysis is shown in figure 8.

Figure 8 provides a visual representation of the indices for corruption risks in Liberia's public service delivery, categorized under the three indicators of the *Corruption Formula: Monopoly of Power (M), Discretion of Officials (D), and Lack of Accountability (A).* The first indicator, *Monopoly of Power* (M), is shown through a single office for authorizations (36%), absolute power by officials (34%), and physical contact for services (29%), demonstrating how unchecked control over services facilitates bribery and exploitation. The second indicator, *Discretion of Officials (D)*, is primarily reflected in the lack of transparency (26%) and personal contact for services (32%), suggesting that the freedom given to officials and service providers to make decisions without oversight often leads to favoritism and exploitation. Furthermore, weak control against offenders (40%) increases opportunities and leads to a lack of fear of corruption. Lastly, *Limited Accountability (A)* is revealed through the culture of impunity (39%), weak legal framework for accountability (34%), and patronage and nepotism (25%), indicating a lack of consequences for corrupt behavior, perpetuating unethical practices, and eroding public trust. Of all the components analyzed, the findings found that weak control against offenders and the culture of impunity are the two key factors creating the highest possibilities for corruption in public service delivery in Liberia, followed by a single office for authorizations, a weak legal framework for accountability, and absolute power by officials. These findings strongly validate the Corruption Formula (C = M + D – A) by showing how a monopoly of power, discretion, and limited accountability collectively creates a conducive and high-risk environment for corruption in Liberia.

Overall, this formula shows how the governance structure in Liberia, with its weak enforcement and high discretion, provides a perfect environment for corruption to thrive. These findings offer new insights by applying a mathematical approach to understand corruption in developing countries, which has rarely been done in previous studies. The evidence from Liberia and the analysis not only extends current knowledge about corruption in fragile states, but also provides a practical framework for assessing corruption risks based on governance structures. These findings also highlight the need for reforms to address unchecked power, improve transparency, and strengthen accountability measures.

Conclusion

This study examined the possibilities of corruption in government services in Liberia despite the establishment of integrity institutions and measures to combat corruption in government services. This study used the Corruption Formula proposed by Robert Klitgaard across three indicators: monopoly of power, discretion by officials, and limited accountability. The findings revealed that service providers have a monopoly over services due to single offices for authorizations, absolute power over officials, and physical contact for services, as they often use their dominant positions for personal gain. Furthermore, there is a lot of discretion by officials, especially weak control against offenders, lack of transparency, and personal contact for services, giving them the freedom to manipulate situations, bend rules, and engage in illicit activities without clear oversight. Finally, there is limited accountability to hold individuals and institutions answerable for their actions, leading to a culture of impunity, as officials constantly engage in wrongdoings without facing any legal consequences. To reduce corruption, the policy recommendation is for Liberia to dismantle monopolistic structures, restrict discretion afforded to officials, and enhance transparency in governance. This research has limitations owing to its use of qualitative methods, reliance on interviews (from a few individuals), and secondary data, which may not provide a full understanding of how service providers engage in corrupt practices. Future studies should employ quantitative or qualitative research or conduct a field study through observation, which may provide a full perspective on how corrupt practices occur between citizens and service providers. Overall, this study is significant and serves as a policy recommendation for the government of Liberia, policymakers, academicians, and stakeholders to develop and implement effective policies aimed at reducing corruption in government services, ultimately fostering a more accountable and transparent governance framework.

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