

## **FUNCTIONALITY OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF NIGERIAN HEALTH BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores functionality of social institutions and Nigerian health behavioural patterns. Illness behaviour is related to absence of health in an individual, it also serve as an individual's response to signs from the illness. Illness behaviour has been related to social factors, such as family structure, religion and culture among others. In this review paper, the Talcott Parsons functionalist perspective was adopted for the paper, theory argued on how different social institutions that make up the society sustain existence based on how each institution functions to coordinate its activities. The analogy of society as an organism is applicable in this context, as any living organism's health depends on the functionality of its organs. When one institution fails to function, it affects the functionality of the society, as a symbiotic relationship exists among the institutions to keep the society healthy. The methodology adopted was the desk review approach. The Desk review approach uses credible secondary sources to gather data and arrive at a logical view of a phenomenon. This afforded the researcher access to relevant articles on Nigerian society, functionality of social institutions in Nigerian society, and understanding a healthy Nigerian society. This search was conducted electronically on various academic databases such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, JSTOR, Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts, Science Direct, Springer Link, and Wiley Online Library. The major findings from the paper revealed that the prevalent patterns of illness behaviour documented in literature about people in Nigeria featured negative illness responses and patronage of traditional or private healthcare providers as popular options among the people. The paper recommended among other things that more health facilities be built and that cost of services be made affordable. Furthermore, health workers to be regularly re-trained to adopt appropriate attitudes at their work places.

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## Introduction

Social institutions in Nigeria such as family, religion, education, and government, significantly impact health behavioral patterns and overall societal well-being (Folorunsho & Salisu, 2024). They regulate behavior, socialize individuals, and shape values that influence health-related choices. These are established structures and practices that fulfill important social needs within the society. They include family, religion, education, economy, and government. Social institutions shape individuals' health behaviors through the norms, values, and beliefs they transmit. For instance, religious institutions can influence dietary habits, whereas family structures impact reproductive health choices (Ngbea, 2020). The functionality of social institutions is crucial for overall societal well-being, including health outcomes. A healthy society requires functional institutions that provide support, education, and resources for individuals to thrive. When human beings relate themselves with others, they create what have been described as forms or structures in order to enable them to meet their needs and function in other ways of life. These forms constitute the framework, channels or means through which they function in society (Folorunsho & Salisu, 2024). Thus, human beings are the creators of forms in society. The formation of rules, regulations, procedures and norms of behaviour are governed and controlled by them in order to function effectively in fulfillment of needs. Social institutions have been created by human beings from social relationships in society to meet such basic needs as stability, law and order, and clearly define roles of authority and decision making. Five major institutions in society – political, educational, economic, family and religious – have emerged because of such needs (Ukpong-Umo and Mboho, 2014). Sociologists and rural sociologists have formulated several definitions of institutions, they further sees institution as an organized system of social relationships which embodies certain common values and procedures and meets certain basic needs of society” (Horton, 1964).

“Social institutions are formal cultural structures devised to meet basic social needs” (Landis, 1955). “An institution is a relatively permanent structure of social patterns of roles and relations that people enact in certain sanctioned and unified ways for the purpose of satisfying basic social needs”. It is clear that institutions, or organized systems of behaviour, differ from organizations, or organized groups of people, and that important essential features of an institution emerge from the definitions: Culturally approved patterns of behaviour including prescribed roles and procedures. Institutions are structured and function as units identifiable from each other though not completely separable. Each institution is laden with values, prescribed roles and codes of conduct, some written in laws, but mostly unwritten and subconsciously exerting social pressure on members of society (Ngbea, 2020). The Patterns of behavior focused on central human needs and organized so as to direct behavior toward the meeting of these needs. Therefore, Institutions are purposive having the satisfaction of social needs as a goal or objective. The Overall patterns or systems of behavior which have persisted long enough to be considered relatively permanent. Change is implied but exists more within the overall structure of the institution, than in the institution itself, e.g. a system of education may change but the institution of education is itself more relatively permanent. However seemingly careless society may appear about certain matters, it carefully provides for basic issues related to survival through relatively permanent forms of behavior that are devised to meet basic social needs. These forms, patterns, systems of behavior are called institutions. Thus as examples, in order to provide for basic physiological needs of the body ( food, shelter and clothing) society creates economic institutions of farming and industry; to provide for law and order, settlement of disputes, administration of affairs, the institution of government has been created; the family as an institution provides for care, protection and nurture of children who would otherwise be helpless; and in order to impart knowledge, skills and socially acceptable attitudes society has created the institution of education. Institutions are therefore the “crystalized mechanisms” created by society involving systematic patterns of behavior so organized and directed as to meet basic social needs. Institutions develop in society through what is called a process of institutionalization and are

largely unplanned products of social living (Mboho and Inyang (2011). In time through repetition, behavior becomes patterned along most effective paths of fulfillment, becomes customary and acquires a set of social sanctions, attitudes and beliefs. These behavior patterns aimed at fulfillment of social needs thus secure cultural approval, and from time to time may secure legal and religious endorsements as they develop and change. Thus, institutionalization is “the process of regularizing and patterning sanctioned procedures in society”(Anderson, 1964). Institutionalization requires the establishment of specific norms, which are group expectations of behavior and the assignment of status positions and role functions in connection with such behavior. For example, Sumner (1974) states that folkway, or the customary ways of behavior that have been considered expedient, are developed out of experience and change to meet new conditions. Mores develop from certain folkways that relate to basic issues of life and survival. The complex of ideas, interests, experiences that are composed in the folkways that develop into mores further develop into institutions in society (Osalusi & Ajayi, 2021).

Health behavioral pattern is any behavior or set of actions taken by an individual who feels ill in order to relieve that experience or better define the meaning of the illness experience in various aspects of the society (Christen, 2004). It describes the way individuals and social groups respond to abnormal signs and symptoms. Illness behavior could also be viewed as how a particular person monitors his or her symptoms, takes action and uses the health care system. It is difficult to undertake a global approach of analysis on illness behavior because societal factors vary throughout the world and shape illness behavior differently. Thus, illness behavior is better sociologically examined and compared across societies with reference to traditional belief systems, economic factors, religion and cultures, among other factors. Indeed, like other types of human behavior, many social and psychological factors intervene and determine the type of illness behavior expressed by an individual social group. (Beker, 2012). There are obvious differences in patterns of illness behavior across societies over time and within sections of a society. For instance, the elite classes were most concerned with health, sanitation and illness in the ancient world. They were propelled by their educational background to desire good health and sanitation. Writing on illness behavior among third world countries, Lipowski (2008) described their interpretation of illness as often associated to: challenges, the enemy, punishment from gods, body weakness etc. He argued that interpretation of symptoms influences the likelihood to adequately recognize an underlying illness and promptly seek medical-care. According to him, some of the description given in third world countries to illness situations are due to the developing nature of these countries and often give rise to seeking traditional remedies or self-help solutions. Despite the introduction of western medicine and health care system in Africa, many African communities still rely on traditional health care (WHO, 2021). WHO (2021:1), defines traditional medicine or traditional health care as the ‘total combination of knowledge and practice, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosing, preventing or eliminating physical illness. This practice exclusively relies on past experiences and observations handed down from generation to generation, verbally or in written form. Illness behaviors in the form of patronage of traditional medicine have become a dominant mode of response among the people in many countries in Africa. This is partly because the use of herbal remedies has a long history and has gained tremendous popularity in Africa and even worldwide. For example, among Ghanaian communities especially in Akan communities, one could be ill through invocation of curse in the name of the river deity, Antoa, upon an unknown offender. Therefore, illness behaviors and actions often taken by the individual in order to relieve his or herself symptoms usually end up in traditional means. It includes trying to appease the offended deity. However, though these traditional means are easily accessible and cheap, they may not be always accurate (Beker, 2012). However, to find a way of improving the functionality of social institution and proffer ways of managing health behavioral pattern in Nigeria are issues that this study will address.

### **Objectives of the study**

The broad objectives of this paper are to analyze functionality of social institution and health behavioral pattern in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the paper were:

- (1) To analyze the health behavioral pattern in Nigerian social institutions
- (2) To evaluate the Manifestations of health behavioral pattern in Nigeria social institutions.
- (3) To determine ways of managing health behavioral pattern in Nigeria social institutions.

### **Theoretical Anchorage**

This paper adopted the functionalist perspective of Talcott Parsons (1903-1979). The theory argued on how different social institutions that make up the society sustain existence based on how each institution functions to coordinate its activities. The analogy of society as an organism is applicable in this context, as any living organism's health depends on the functionality of its organs. According to Butler (2006), when one institution fails to function, it affects the functionality of the society, as a symbiotic relationship exists among the institutions to keep the society healthy. However, it becomes more tragic when all the institutions malfunction, as is observed in many human societies today, displaying all forms of social problems that are totally out of control, bringing the society to the verge of collapse (Oladejo & Adenuga, 2023).

### **Basic assumptions of the functionalist perspective**

The functionalist theory of Parsons (1902-1979) provided the premise for assessing how healthy Nigerian society is. This theory explains the synergistic roles of various social institutions in ensuring a healthy Nigerian society, which, on the contrary, is not the situation. Given this, the functionality of social institutions contributes to the maintenance and well-being of society, depicting a healthy society (Osalusi & Ajayi, 2021). Such a contribution is positive because it makes society whole, guaranteeing continuity and health by meeting societies needs (Folorunsho & Salisu, 2025). On the contrary, dysfunctionality of social institutions contributes to an unhealthy society. For instance, the failure of economic institutions to produce and distribute goods and services will undermine society's continued existence, with family institutions to reproduce, nurture, and socialize young ones. Expectedly, society will experience dysfunctionality. The chances of disruption and social disorder lie ahead for such a society. This theoretical scheme is suitable for this review as it addresses the issue in focus.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Healthy Society***

This concept represents the functionality of human society, which is the aggregate of people coexisting in a geographical spread in terms of living together harmoniously and advancing (Langenhove, 2023; Stivachtis & McKeil, 2018). Within the parlance of Sociology, society is described as a group of individuals with commonly shared territory and culture, living together as an entity in the defined territory with a sense of oneness and mutual respect (Omorogiuwa & Azorundu, 2024; Akintunde & Eseyin, 2023). This study argued that society is a complex whole that enables human beings to carry out life-related activities. For this reason, it is captured as human society in this review. This is to ensure harmonious relationships of human beings in society through defined patterns of interaction to guarantee a healthy human society. According to Buse et al. (2023), a healthy society functions properly as determined by its various parts. To strengthen this, studies (Folorunsho & Salisu, 2025; Langenhove, 2023; Osalusi & Ajayi, 2021; Butler, 2006) have also linked a healthy society to the quality of human society. In this regard, four parameters were used to assess the health of any human society, such as stability, productivity, ideal expression, and liveability. These parameters are reflected in the functionality of the social institutions – family, religion, education, economy, and political arrangements. For instance, the family is expected to reproduce young ones and raise them properly for society to be stable. This argued that the extent to which that

family does those things will determine how healthy the society will be. Therefore, this study seeks to determine if the Nigerian society is stable, productive, ideal, and liveable.

***Family Institution:***

This is the basic unit of society responsible for intimacy between male and female for the reproduction of young ones, and proper nurturing for growth and development (Akintunde & Eseyin, 2023; Nnachi et al., 2020). This suggests that it comprises a group of individuals that either came together by marriage or legitimately adopted, bond together while they ensure their co-existence, whether physically together or not (Oladejo & Adenuga, 2023). Literature (Nnachi et al., 2020; Giddens, 2006) summarized the roles of a family to include reproduction, implying bringing forth young ones; socialization, incorporating family members together for the good of society; provision of emotional support by taking care of emotional needs of family members; social security, providing a sense of security to family members; regulation of sexual behaviour implies sexual discipline; ascription of status covering identifiable figure; and economic role is to ensure usefulness of individuals in terms of production capacity.

***Religious Institution:***

In the words of Onyemauwa (2019), religion is to promote and ensure the best relations between human beings and God Almighty. It defines the relationship of the human being with the Supreme Being. According to Ikechi-Ekpendu and Chidi-Ekpendu (2016), religion is about belief in the supernatural, that is, sacred and divine. Thus, religion sets the standard of expected actions in peaceful dealings with fellow human beings. Religious institutions establish the framework that guides the conduct of individuals in society, such as good conduct, hard work, and helping the needy to make this world a better place, and prepare for heaven (Zhao, 2019). Literature (Otubah, 2024; Baggett, 2020; Zhao, 2019; Nath, 2015) highlighted the roles of religious institutions in society, among which are: morality preaching, spirituality, social support, humanitarian activities, socialization, and social integration.

***Educational Institution:***

Education is an avenue through which knowledge is transmitted in society. According to Nwala (1985:242), “Education is the avenue whereby a person acquires ideas, beliefs and attitudes”. This is done at formal and informal levels (Osalusi & Ajayi, 2021). As an institution within society, education aids the transmission of knowledge to members of society (Chinwendu & Itoje-Akporiniowo, 2020). Aside from this, it aids human growth and development over time due to increased what is learnt, which further promotes creativity and innovation in society (Osalusi & Ajayi, 2021). What makes this possible is the fact that it aids total human being transformation in the areas of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains. Based on this, any society's functionality is traceable to the quality of its educational institutions. This has been advocated because an effective education system performs social control and drives social change (Folorunsho & Salisu, 2025). Furthermore, it fosters adherence to societal processes because education promotes literacy and enlightenment.

***Political Institution:***

Oni and Faluyi (2020) described political institutions as the organized framework that governs the social life of people in society. This is achieved through laws that define roles, responsibilities, and rights conferred on individuals and punishments applicable to individuals who default on the laws of such a society (Walya, 2021). Therefore, the institution sets rules for members of society to adhere to for stability. With an established political structure, it has been possible in many societies to have maintained stability and order, promoted fairness in resource distribution, enforced laws, managed public affairs, engaged citizens and made leaders, resolved conflicts, and safeguard rights and promote freedom among all (Omorogiuwa & Azorundu, 2024).

***Economic Institution:***



The economy as a social institution encapsulates the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in a society (Fazli, 2021). Human beings' survival makes this institution crucial and becomes germane at the instance of managing legitimate economic activities while preventing underground economic activities (Folorunsho & Salisu, 2025). There are different economic systems (capitalist, socialist, communist, and mixed economy), but the central issue is making goods and services available to citizens. Therefore, the resources that are often scarce are meant to be mobilised to meet people's basic needs at affordable rates, irrespective of the forces of demand and supply. This is promoted for society to survive.

### **Analysis of health behavior in Social institutions in Nigerian society**

#### ***Family Institution:***

Overwhelming positions on the Nigerian family argued there are issues of family failures, parental neglect, and deviancy among children. Omorogiuwa and Azorodu (2024) reported family dysfunction in Nigeria in their study, as well as several studies like Akintunde and Eseyin (2023), Chineyemba (2023), Ajani and Fakunle (2021), and Nnachi et al. (2020). In the study of Nnachi et al. (2020), it was established that the family values of Nigerian society have collapsed, while Ajani and Fakunle (2021) attributed this to abuses, addiction, neglect, emotional disturbance, and secrecy. Furthermore, the study of Chineyemba (2023) attributed family dysfunctionality to erroneous notions of the rod for children and pampering in the face of wrongdoing. It was based on these positions that Omorogiuwa and Azorodu (2024) concluded that Nigerian families have failed in their roles to the functionality of society.

#### ***Religious Institution:***

As against religious institution roles, studies (Salifu, 2025; Anele and Dibia, 2024; Otubah, 2024; Ngbea, 2020) partly suggest different degrees of exploitation, false spirituality, and deceit in the name of a supreme being. As a multi-religious society, drawing from this, Ngbea (2020) established that religious leaders are divisive in their preaching to deceive their congregation and present themselves as mini-gods to amass wealth. Nigeria is a religious society with diverse ungodly and unholy acts as against the number of churches, mosques, and traditional outfits. Moreover, Anele and Dibia (2024) argued on how religious insincerity has undermined Nigerian society's development. It was reported in the study that individuals who ought to have contributed to the stability of the society have remained gullible and useless to the entity. This to Rapheal (2014) is harmful to society. There are views that religion is more negative impact on the Nigerian society (Muhammad, 2017; Yesufu, 2016). In the study of Apseywen (2020), abuse in religious institutions was found to have contributed to the disorganization of Nigerian society. The author further revealed that it has emerged as a business, has become an agent of disunity and destruction of human lives and properties. In a related study, Salifu (2025) discussed how religious activities of the Nigerian society have battered her foreign policy. Based on this view, religion has not projected the image of Nigerian society rightly.

#### ***Educational Institution:***

Education facilitates learning to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitude (Adeniyi, 2019). However, the educational institution of Nigeria remains what it was meant for by the colonial masters, which is to offer literacy to make communication easy (Kayode-Olawoyin, 2021). In the study of Birabi and Ogeh (2020) argued that the current challenges in Nigeria were traced to a weak educational system. The authors attributed this weak educational institution that is inconsistent with its policies and structure. Also, several studies (Kayode-Olawoyin, 2021; Ololube, 2013) have condemned the Nigerian government's attitude towards educational funding, making societal stability difficult. Furthermore, there are views (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020; Adeniyi, 2019), that attributed growing moral decadence in Nigerian society to the weak educational system in the country because attitude formation is compromised in schools. Adeniyi's (2019) study attributed the weak performance of Nigerian

educational institutions to its society to be inadequate funding, poor facilities, and lack of qualified teachers, quality, and accessibility issues. This development has been linked to an increase in dropouts from schools and resultant engagement in underground economic activities such as kidnapping and rituals for survival, contributing to the societal woes.

***Political Institution:***

The activities in the Nigerian political space are characterized by instability and disorderliness. According to Amusan and Ejoke (2017), the political institution of Nigeria has created many anomalies with negative impacts on society. For instance, the study of Omorogiuwa and Azorundu (2024) mentioned that the high-level indiscipline and corruption of political leaders to have compromised the values of the Nigerian society. In support of this, Oni and Faluyi (2020) argued that wrong political decisions had created pressure on society to the extent that citizens struggle to survive and would engage in any act to survive. In most cases, this pressure has led many into inimical acts that have impacted society negatively. It can be suggested that the current political instability and corruption among the political class have fuelled the disorganization of the Nigerian society.

***Economic Institution:***

The Nigerian economy is characterized by inflation, poverty, and fiscal deficits, unsettling the society (Salako et al., 2023). This is seen in the increase in low-paying, and GDP per capita. Aboluwarin and Oyedapo (2023) account for the economic institution's impact on Nigerian society is negative, as the authors' study reported economic hardship as a result of importation import-dependent society. In a report released by the nation's bureau of statistics (2024), the economic drivers at the lowest level are making survival in society difficult. Studies (Folorunsho et al., 2025; Omorogiuwa & Azorundu, 2024) suggest that Nigerian economic institutions have failed to produce a healthy society for decades, owing to inconsistencies in economic policies and programs, which were conceived to sustain the society. However, players within the economy have compromised several of those policies and programs in their interest (Salako et al., 2023).

**Manifestation of health behavior in Nigerian society**

The manifestation of unhealthy symptoms is obvious in Nigerian society. Presently, the incidence of ritual killings, depression, suicide, divorce, and other social problems like high unemployment rate, poverty, and prostitution is high. These outcomes have made Nigerian society unstable, less productive, uncoordinated, and unliveable, making Japa an indispensable option. This is traceable to the dysfunctionality of family, economy, and other social institutions in the Nigerian society. Family failure of roles as established in this review corroborate the findings of Omorogiuwa and Azorundu (2024), and Akintunde and Eseyin (2023), which established dysfunctional Nigerian society to family institution collapse as evidenced in the recently increasing rate of depression, anxiety disorders, personality disorder and substance use disorder, among others. Furthermore, the review established that the religious institution in Nigeria is full of insincerity, exploitation, false spirituality, and deceit. These positions were corroborated in the studies of Salifu (2025), and Otubah (2024), which claimed religious abuse in Nigeria is rampant and affects the state of its society, which is presently unhealthy. Similarly, reviewed views on educational institutions in Nigeria play weak roles and cannot contribute substantially to functionality. This is corroborated in the studies of Birabil and Ogeh (2020) that traced the dysfunctionality of Nigeria's educational institutions to several challenges making the society unhealthy, as well as that of Adeniyi (2019) that reported an underdeveloped status of the Nigerian society as a result of failures of the educational institutions. Also, the synthesis analysis of the economic institution of the Nigerian society revealed fiscal issues and poor purchasing power of the citizens. This agrees with the studies of Folorunsho and Salisu (2024) that the economic trajectory of Nigeria since independence remains unimpressive and has not propelled her productivity to the desired. For this reason, she remains an import-dependent society. This view was further buttressed in the

study of Aboluwarin and Oyedapo (2023) which reported economic hardship in the society. Lastly, the reviewed position on political institutions and Nigerian society skewed towards negativity. This suggests that current political instability in the society makes it unliveable responsibility for the high rate of Japa, especially among the youths. These are established in the studies of Oni and Faluyi (2020) that attributed the collapse of the society to political instability, and the study of Amusan and Ejoke (2017), which confirmed the prevalence of corrupt practices among the political class in Nigeria at the detriment of citizens.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a Desk review approach. This research uses credible secondary sources to gather data and arrived at a logical view of the phenomenon. This afforded the researcher access to relevant articles on Nigerian society, functionality of social institution in Nigerian society, and a healthy Nigerian society. The search was conducted electronically on various academic databases such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, JSTOR, Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts, Science Direct, SpringerLink, and Wiley Online Library. Selected Articles were considered relevant based on their content, journal quality, and paper citation. These parameters justified the inclusion criteria of the papers reviewed in this study.

### **Results and Discussion of findings**

The Study findings revealed that patent medicine vendors were the most common sources of primary care following the onset of illness, while fewer individuals used formal care. The factors that give rise to this included their educational status, income, occupation and body mass index. These factors also differentiated the rural dweller from the urban dwellers.

Also, the study found that individuals preferred seeking for solution to their ailment in private facilities rather than the government hospitals. Furthermore, the findings corroborate with the study by Jackson (2022) who found behavior in some African societies and found that 70% of individuals accept the use of traditional remedies and faith based solutions. Again, this finding reflects the situation in Southeast Nigeria given findings by Uzochukwu and Onwujekwe (2004), and Onyenoro et al (2015). In a recent study by WHO (2024) in Nigeria found that 71% of rural dwellers have reported inappropriate health seeking behavior during their last illness episode, while only 53% of urban dwellers reported inappropriate health seeking behavior during their last illness episode. Similarly, the finding from the paper also revealed that variables influencing their health seeking behavior and behavioral pattern include: socio-demographic characteristics such as age, marital-status, highest level of education completed, family size and socioeconomic status, these variables are highly relevant and applicable to the Southeast in Nigeria. This seems to be in agreement with the study by Charmaz (2023) found that the major problems related to illness behavior of people in Nigeria are as follows: loss of self, devalued self, depression, poor stress management etc.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper revealed that Nigerian social institutions is presently unhealthy, as the five components are dysfunctional. This is based on their inability to fulfil their respective roles to society, making it difficult to have a stable, productive, ideal, and liveable society. It was concluded that the Nigerian society is unhealthy and should be in an intensive care unit because of its dysfunctionality, with obvious symptoms. Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. There should be strong family values of love, hard work, and peaceful co-existence which must be promoted to make Nigerian society better. Nigerian Parents and adults must lead by example in the quest to restore Nigerian family values.
2. It is important for all the stakeholders in the educational institution, like the government, parents/guardians, to urgently rededicate themselves to making the institution functional to bail it out of its present



situation and mishap. This will create avenues to enlighten the general public and engage idle minds who are constituting a nuisance in the Nigerian society.

3. Religious leaders must make efforts to promote ethical conduct of peace, social, holy spirituality, moral, godliness, and psychological support. This will heal Nigerian society.

4. The economic players must address the multifaceted economic challenges facing the Nigerian society. This will create the avenues to reposition the economy from import import-dependent to an export society. Aside, other associated problems in the society like poverty and unemployment, will become things of the past as jobs will be created.

5. Transparency on the part of the political class is crucial. For this reason, it will be good for the process of electing political leaders to be re-visited, while stiffer penalties are enacted to try corrupt political leaders and enforced when found guilty.

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