

# Nodes in the Equatorial Guinea Transnational Crime and Kleptocracy Regime and Case Study with Comparison to Nigeria

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## Abstract

This report includes comprehensive research on transnational crime and kleptocracy in Equatorial Guinea, aiming to inform policymakers, civil society actors, and international stakeholders about the nature of these challenges and identify strategies to effectively combat them. By fostering a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and proposing concrete solutions, the project seeks to contribute to the promotion of good governance, rule of law, and accountability in Equatorial Guinea.

## Definition of Terms

1. Kleptocracy: Using an article published by Chatham House, the definition of kleptocracy for the purposes of this paper is corruption at the highest level of government that allows for the embezzlement of public funds in gross amounts for private use wherein officials face no enforcement or impunity for their actions.<sup>1</sup>
2. Trafficking in persons: The crime wherein people are trafficked and compelled to participate either in forced labor or commercial sex as indicated by the U.S. Department of State definition.<sup>2</sup>
3. Sex Trafficking: This paper follows a modified version of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security definition which focuses on the use of force, fraud or coercion in order to move a person and compel them to perform sexual acts.<sup>3</sup>
4. Arms Trafficking: Arms, or weapons, trafficking is the illegal “export, import, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of arms, their parts and components and ammunition across national borders, as well as intentional diversion of firearms from legal to illegal commerce, without involving the movement of items across physical borders” as defined by the Organized Crime Index.<sup>4</sup>
5. Wildlife trafficking: Defined as the harvesting and selling of wildlife, and wildlife products, (including pelts, ivory, plants, and furs) to be used as medicine, fashion, food, or pets sold to consumers as said by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.<sup>5</sup>
6. Autocracy: As defined by Cornell Law School’s Legal Information Institute, an autocracy “is a political regime where a single individual - an autocrat - holds the power, qualified as personal and absolute power.”<sup>6</sup>
7. Extractive Industries: Following the United Nations definition of extractive industries, extractive industries recover raw materials from the earth, process them, and turn them into products and services for use by consumers.<sup>7</sup>
8. Embezzlement: The United States Department of Justice defines embezzlement as “ the fraudulent appropriation of property by a person to whom such property has been

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<sup>1</sup> Mayne, Thomas . 2022. “What Is Kleptocracy and How Does It Work?” Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank. July 4, 2022. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/07/what-kleptocracy-and-how-does-it-work>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State. “2024 trafficking in persons report: Equatorial Guinea.” *Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons*, United States of America. (n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security. “What Is Human Trafficking?” Department of Homeland Security. September 22, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> *Criminality in Equatorial Guinea - the organized crime index*. The Organized Crime Index | ENACT. (n.d.-b). [https://ocindex.net/country/equatorial\\_guinea](https://ocindex.net/country/equatorial_guinea)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. “Wildlife Trafficking | U.S. Customs and Border Protection.” 2023. [www.cbp.gov](https://www.cbp.gov). August 1, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> “Autocracy,” *Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute*. Accessed August 17, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Criminalization of Wildlife Trafficking,” accessed August 17, 2024,

entrusted, or into whose hands it has lawfully come. It differs from larceny in that the original taking was lawful, or with the consent of the owner, while in larceny the felonious intent must have existed at the time of the taking.”<sup>8</sup>

9. Money Laundering: The United States Department of the Treasury defines money laundering as “financial transactions in which criminals, including terrorist organizations, attempt to disguise the proceeds, sources or nature of their illicit activities. Money laundering facilitates a broad range of serious underlying criminal offenses and ultimately threatens the integrity of the financial system.”<sup>9</sup>

## Introduction

Equatorial Guinea, also referred to as E.G. in this paper, faces significant challenges related to institutional transnational crime and kleptocracy, which undermine governance, exacerbate inequality, and hinder socio-economic progress. These issues have garnered international attention due to their impact on regional stability and global security. EG Justice, a non-profit organization based in the United States that focuses on the advancement of human rights in Equatorial Guinea, recognizes the urgent need for research to understand the root causes, dynamics, and implications of these phenomena and to develop evidence-based policy recommendations for addressing them.

Human trafficking and the many other forms of transnational crime, remain a pervasive and pressing issue globally, with Equatorial Guinea serving as both a destination and transit country for victims and trafficked goods from Latin/South America into and through the African continent<sup>10</sup>. This phenomenon poses significant human rights concerns, undermines the rule of law, and perpetuates cycles of exploitation and vulnerability. EG Justice recognizes the imperative need for research to comprehensively understand the dynamics of transnational crime in this context, assess existing prevention and response mechanisms, and develop targeted strategies to address this multifaceted challenge.

## Research Question and Research Methods

How might Equatorial Guinea combat institutionalized transnational crime and kleptocracy effectively to promote justice, stability, and development within the country? The research methods being used in this assessment are three interviews with various experts in transnational crime and Equatorial Guinea conducted over five months between two countries. Additionally, the research includes a comparative analysis with Nigeria, a country that has seen advancement in the areas of transnational criminal activity and kleptocracy.

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<sup>8</sup> “Justice Manual- Embezzlement.” 2015. United States Department of Justice. February 19, 2015.

<https://www.justice.gov/archives/jm/criminal-resource-manual-1005-embezzlement>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY. 2019. “Money Laundering | U.S. Department of the Treasury.” Treasury.gov. December 9, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State. “2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Equatorial Guinea.” U.S. Department of State. (2023).

# **Key Findings**

## **High-Level Corruption Involving the Obiang Family**

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo and his son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue (Teodorín), are notorious for their involvement in major corruption scandals. In 2017, Teodorín was convicted by a French court for embezzling millions of euros from the state and using the funds to acquire luxury assets, such as a €107 million mansion in Paris and a collection of exotic cars<sup>11</sup>. This case highlights how corruption is deeply entrenched at the highest levels of government in Equatorial Guinea, making it nearly impossible to hold the ruling family accountable for their actions.

## **Compromised Law Enforcement and Judiciary**

The law enforcement agencies and judiciary in Equatorial Guinea are heavily influenced by the ruling Obiang family. Despite strong evidence of corruption, domestic courts have consistently failed to prosecute members of the ruling elite<sup>12</sup>. Even when international bodies, such as the U.S. and French governments, have taken legal action against Teodorín, these efforts have had little impact on the domestic legal system, which remains under the Obiang family's control. The lack of judicial independence ensures that corrupt officials, particularly those close to the ruling family, continue to operate with impunity, further entrenching corruption in the country.

## **International Legal Actions**

International efforts to combat corruption in Equatorial Guinea include legal actions by countries like France and the United States. In 2012, French authorities seized luxury assets belonging to Teodorín, including a mansion in Paris, as part of an investigation into embezzlement and money laundering<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Justice has sought to recover over \$70 million linked to corrupt practices by the Obiang family<sup>14</sup>. These international actions underscore the global recognition of corruption in Equatorial Guinea. However, they have had limited impact on curbing corruption within the country, where the legal system remains compromised.

## **Mismanagement of Oil Wealth**

Equatorial Guinea is one of Africa's largest oil producers, yet the vast majority of its population remains impoverished. The ruling elite, particularly the Obiang family, has been accused of diverting oil revenues into private accounts instead of investing in public

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<sup>11</sup> "France: Equatorial Guinea Vice President's Conviction Upheld." 2021. Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch. July 28, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> RFI, "French Authorities Seize Luxury Mansion Belonging to Son of Equatorial Guinea President Obiang." *BBC News*, August 18, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> "Department of Justice Seeks to Recover More than \$70.8 Million in Proceeds of Corruption from Government Minister of Equatorial Guinea." 2011. United States Department of Justice. October 25, 2011.

infrastructure<sup>15</sup>. For example, while Teodorín lives lavishly, the country's healthcare and education systems are severely underfunded, with much of the oil wealth being misappropriated by the ruling family<sup>16</sup>. The mismanagement and embezzlement of oil revenues have led to significant underdevelopment, leaving the general population without basic services despite the country's vast natural resources.

### **Lack of Government Transparency**

The government of Equatorial Guinea operates with minimal transparency, particularly in the management of public finances. For instance, oil revenue management is highly opaque, with significant sums suspected of being diverted into private accounts controlled by the Obiang family<sup>17</sup>. There are no independent institutions to monitor government spending, and attempts to report on or investigate corruption are often met with repression. The lack of transparency allows corruption to thrive unchecked, with the public being kept in the dark about how national resources are being used.

### **Human Rights Abuses Linked to Corruption**

Corruption in Equatorial Guinea is closely linked to human rights abuses. Critics of the government, including journalists who report on corruption, are often subject to harassment, arbitrary detention, or even torture<sup>18</sup>. For example, journalists who attempt to expose government corruption face severe repercussions, creating a climate of fear that discourages anti-corruption efforts.<sup>19</sup> The intersection of corruption and human rights abuses perpetuates a cycle of impunity, where those in power continue to exploit the country's resources without fear of opposition.

## **Research Approach**

This research project is utilizing a comparative analysis between our target country, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria, another Western African country that has seen notable success in our area of focus of kleptocracy and transnational crime. By analyzing currently available research and case studies on Nigeria and its approach to handling transnational crime within its own borders, as well as analyzing the similarities and differences between the two countries being analyzed, we will be able to draw conclusions as to possible recommendations for E.G. to be able to reduce elements of transnational crime and kleptocracy in the country in order to promote a more stable and safe democratic society.

The analysis in this report will revolve around addressing the following questions:

1. What are the key drivers and facilitators of transnational crime and kleptocracy in Equatorial Guinea?

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<sup>15</sup> World Bank. 2015. "The World Bank in Equatorial Guinea: Overview." World Bank. 2015.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/equatorialguinea/overview>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Equatorial Guinea." U.S. Department of State. (2023).

<sup>19</sup> "Equatorial Guinea 2020 Archives." n.d. Amnesty International.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/equatorial-guinea/report-equatorial-guinea/>.

2. How do these phenomena intersect with broader governance challenges and socioeconomic dynamics in the country?
3. What strategies and interventions have been effective in addressing transnational crime and kleptocracy in other contexts, and how might they be adapted to the Equatorial Guinean context?
4. What role can domestic and international actors play in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance in Equatorial Guinea?
5. What are the potential barriers to implementing reforms, and how can they be overcome?
6. What are the primary drivers and routes of human trafficking from Latin and South America to Equatorial Guinea?
7. How do socio-economic factors, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities, contribute to the vulnerability of individuals to trafficking?
8. What are the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, including government agencies, law enforcement, civil society organizations, and international partners, in addressing human trafficking in Equatorial Guinea?
9. What are the existing legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms for combating human trafficking in Equatorial Guinea, and how effective are they in practice?

By addressing these research questions, this project aims to generate actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to tackle transnational crime and kleptocracy in Equatorial Guinea effectively.

In terms of gathering data, the foundation of the data on kleptocracy is from what is collected from various sources such as government reports, financial disclosures, international indices, media reports, and academic studies. This includes data on GDP per capita, government expenditure, revenue from natural resources, income inequality, and political freedoms.

The analysis of trends in the indices over an extended period of time is used to assess changes in the level of kleptocracy. The plotting of the indices over multiple years and charting significant trends helps to identify the changes in kleptocracy over time. Additionally, comparing the indices with key political events or policy changes provides insights into the drives of kleptocratic behavior.

The compilation of data and subsequent analysis guides the policy implications. This research provides a basis for potential strategies for combating kleptocracy in Equatorial Guinea. Potential recommendations may include strengthening anti-corruption measures, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering political reforms and social engagement.

The foundation of the data on transnational crime stems from EG Justice's existing research database and open source information available. Information is collected from various sources such as existing literature on transnational crime in Equatorial Guinea. Other statistics were gathered from official sources such as law enforcement agencies, judiciary records, and governmental reports.

The implications of the findings will guide policy implications and propose recommendations for addressing transnational crime that impacts Equatorial Guinea.

# Literature Review

## Background on Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea's policy on combating transnational crime and government kleptocracy is hindered by several significant challenges, including widespread corruption, limited law enforcement capabilities, and weak governance. Equatorial Guinea, a small country in Central Africa, is rich in oil and gas resources but plagued by governance issues and human rights abuses. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has ruled since 1979, making him one of the longest-serving leaders in the world. The political landscape is marked by a lack of transparency and accountability, with power concentrated within the ruling elite, often resulting in significant embezzlement and corruption which contributes to the pseudo-autocracy of the regime<sup>20</sup>. The Organized Crime Index has the most robust research on organized and transnational crime, specifically in countries where data is not very widespread.

Equatorial Guinea is both a source and destination for human trafficking. Women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking, and forced labor is prevalent among men, women, and children. Despite international commitments to combat human trafficking, the government has shown little to no effective action in prosecuting or convicting offenders. Equatorial Guinea, a small country on the west coast of Central Africa, faces significant human rights challenges, including issues related to sex trafficking and forced labor. These problems are deeply entrenched in the country's social, economic, and political fabric, exacerbated by weak governance, corruption, and limited enforcement of existing laws.

Sex trafficking in Equatorial Guinea involves the coercion or forceful recruitment of individuals, primarily women and children, into prostitution. Victims are often lured with false promises of employment, education, or a better life, only to find themselves trapped in exploitative conditions.<sup>21</sup> The country's oil wealth has led to significant economic disparities, making vulnerable populations more susceptible to traffickers' deceptive tactics.

There are several factors contributing to sex trafficking in Equatorial Guinea. These include poverty and lack of economic opportunities. Individuals, particularly women and children, are more vulnerable to traffickers.<sup>22</sup> Next, high levels of corruption within government institutions and law enforcement hinder efforts to combat trafficking effectively. Often traffickers operate with impunity due to bribery and collusion with officials. Finally, the public's limited awareness of the risks of trafficking contributes to the ongoing problem.

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<sup>20</sup> *Criminality in Equatorial Guinea - the organized crime index*. The Organized Crime Index | ENACT. (n.d.-b). [https://ocindex.net/country/equatorial\\_guinea](https://ocindex.net/country/equatorial_guinea)

<sup>21</sup> Thelwell, Kim. "5 Facts about Child Poverty in Equatorial Guinea." The Borgen Project, January 12, 2023. <https://borgenproject.org/5-facts-about-child-poverty-in-equatorial-guinea/#:~:text=Equatorial%20Guinea%20is%20the%20third,Guinea's%20population%20lives%20in%20poverty.>

<sup>22</sup> Pekula, M. "Top 4 Facts About Human Trafficking in Equatorial Guinea." The Borgen Project, December 16, 2019. <https://borgenproject.org/top-4-facts-about-human-trafficking-in-equatorial-guinea/>

Similarly, forced labor is a critical issue in Equatorial Guinea. It affects various sectors, including agriculture, domestic work, and the oil industry.<sup>23</sup> Victims of forced labor are often subjected to harsh working conditions, long hours, and little pay. Further, they may also face physical abuse and restrictions to their freedom of movement.

The factors contributing to forced labor include a weak legal framework that lacks comprehensive protections for workers, and insufficient penalties for violators. The inconsistent enforcement of their laws against forced labor makes them ineffective. Inadequate oversight and labor inspections allow exploitative practices to persist unchecked. Employers can exploit workers with little fear of repercussions. Migrants from neighboring countries seeking better opportunities are particularly vulnerable to forced labor. They lack proper documentation and legal protections so they are easy targets for exploitation.

Efforts to combat sex trafficking and forced labor in Equatorial Guinea face numerous challenges. Strengthening the capacity of law enforcement and judicial systems to identify, prosecute, and convict traffickers and exploiters is critical.<sup>24</sup> This includes training officials and providing resources for victim support. Trafficking and forced labor are transnational issues that require coordinated responses. Collaborating with international organizations and neighboring countries is essential for effective prevention and intervention efforts. Finally, raising public awareness about the dangers of trafficking and forced labor through education campaigns can empower communities to protect themselves and report suspicious activities.

Addressing sex trafficking and forced labor in Equatorial Guinea requires a multifaceted approach involving government action, international cooperation, and community engagement. Strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing enforcement mechanisms, and increasing public awareness are critical steps toward eradicating these human rights abuses. Despite the challenges, sustained efforts and commitment from all stakeholders can lead to meaningful progress in combating these issues.

While drug markets are not deeply entrenched in Equatorial Guinea, there are concerns about the trafficking and consumption of drugs like heroin, cocaine, and cannabis. The government's efforts to combat drug trafficking have been inconsistent, with occasional crackdowns but limited long-term impact.

Equatorial Guinea, like many other countries, grapples with the challenges of drug trafficking and drug use. Despite its small size and population, the country is part of a broader network of illicit drug trade routes that impact the region. Drug trafficking and usage have significant social, economic, and health implications, which are exacerbated by the country's political and economic context.

Drug trafficking in Equatorial Guinea primarily involves the transit of narcotics, especially cocaine and heroin, from South America to Europe. The country's strategic location along the Gulf of Guinea makes it an attractive route for traffickers seeking to bypass more

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<sup>23</sup> United Nations. "UNODC global report on trafficking in persons: crises shift trafficking patterns and hinder victim identification." (2023, January 24). *UNODC.ORG*. Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2023/January/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons-2022.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Verite. "Trafficking Risk in Sub-Saharan African Supply Chains." Verité. (2023, November 8). <https://verite.org/africa/explore-by-country/equatorial-guinea/>

heavily monitored areas. There are multiple factors contributing to drug trafficking. Equatorial Guinea's position along the Atlantic coast provides a convenient transshipment point for narcotics. Inadequate governance and high levels of corruption allow traffickers to operate with relative impunity. Underpaid law enforcement and border control officials are susceptible to bribery, facilitating the movement of drugs through the country. Additionally, the country's law enforcement agencies lack the necessary resources and training to effectively combat sophisticated drug trafficking operations. This includes inadequate surveillance technology and lack of cooperation with international anti-trafficking bodies.

The prevalence of drug use in Equatorial Guinea is less documented compared to other regions, but it is an emerging concern. Increased drug trafficking often correlates with higher local drug consumption, and Equatorial Guinea is no exception. The most commonly abused substances include cannabis, cocaine, and increasingly, synthetic drugs. There are multiple factors contributing to drug use. First, significant economic inequality and poverty create environments where drug use can proliferate, particularly among unemployed youth and marginalized communities seeking escape from difficult living conditions. Second, limited public awareness about the dangers of drug use and the absence of comprehensive drug education programs contribute to the spread of substance abuse. Third, rapid urbanization and the influx of foreign workers related to the oil industry have disrupted traditional social structures, which can lead to increased drug use as a form of coping mechanism.

The use and trafficking of drugs impacts society. Drug trafficking and use are often associated with increased crime rates and violence, affecting community safety and social stability. Additionally, drug abuse leads to a range of health problems, including addiction, mental health disorders, and the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS through needle sharing. Also, drug addiction can lead to a decrease in workforce productivity and an increase in healthcare costs, burdening the economy. Finally, combating drug trafficking and treating drug addiction require significant financial and human resources, diverting them from other critical areas such as education and infrastructure development.

Efforts to address drug trafficking and use in Equatorial Guinea face numerous challenges, including limited resources, corruption, and insufficient international cooperation. However, progress can be made when efforts are made to face these challenges. Enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies through better training, equipment, and international collaboration is essential to effectively combat drug trafficking. Implementing comprehensive drug education programs to raise awareness about the risks of drug use and promoting preventive measures can help reduce the demand for drugs. Collaborating with neighboring countries and international organizations can improve the effectiveness of anti-trafficking operations and help dismantle transnational drug networks. Providing support services and rehabilitation programs for drug users can aid in recovery and reintegration into society, reducing the long-term social and economic impacts of drug abuse.

Drug trafficking and use in Equatorial Guinea present significant challenges that require a coordinated and multifaceted response. By strengthening law enforcement, increasing public awareness, and enhancing international cooperation, the country can better address these issues and mitigate their negative impacts on society and the economy. Sustained efforts and

commitment from the government, civil society, and international partners are crucial to achieving meaningful progress in this area.

The country plays a role in the regional smuggling of small arms, which contributes to piracy and maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea. Corruption and political instability exacerbate the challenges in addressing arms trafficking with some involvement from the ruling elite for example, President Obiang's son and nephew. Small arms smuggling in Equatorial Guinea is a significant security concern, affecting both national stability and regional safety. The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) is facilitated by weak governance, porous borders, and the region's ongoing conflicts. Understanding the dynamics of small arms smuggling in Equatorial Guinea requires examining its causes, impacts, and efforts to combat the issue.

There are multiple causes. Equatorial Guinea's location along the Gulf of Guinea makes it a transit point for various illicit trades, including small arms. Its proximity to conflict-prone regions in Central and West Africa exacerbates the problem.<sup>25</sup> The country's borders are poorly monitored, making it easier for smugglers to transport arms in and out. The lack of effective border control and surveillance infrastructure contributes to the ease of smuggling operations. High levels of corruption within government and law enforcement agencies facilitate smuggling activities. Officials may be bribed to turn a blind eye to illegal arms shipments. The presence of conflicts in neighboring countries, such as the Central African Republic and Cameroon, fuels the demand for small arms. These weapons often find their way into Equatorial Guinea, either as a transit point or a destination.

There are many impacts of small arms smuggling. National security is affected. The availability of small arms contributes to higher crime rates and violence, posing a significant threat to public safety. Armed robberies, kidnappings, and other violent crimes become more common. The proliferation of small arms can lead to political instability, as armed groups or individuals may challenge government authority, leading to unrest and potential conflict. It makes a regional impact. Small arms smuggling can exacerbate regional conflicts, as weapons flow into areas of tension, fueling ongoing violence and instability in neighboring countries. The increase in armed violence can lead to displacement of populations, creating refugee crises and putting additional strain on already limited resources.

Efforts to combat small arms smuggling include the following. Enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to detect and intercept smuggled arms is crucial. This includes better training, equipment, and corruption prevention measures. Improving border security through increased patrols, surveillance technology, and cooperation with neighboring countries can help curb smuggling activities. Participating in regional agreements and initiatives, such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the African Union's efforts to combat small arms proliferation, can bolster national efforts. Collaborating with international organizations and neighboring countries to share intelligence and coordinate operations against smuggling networks can enhance effectiveness. Seeking assistance from international bodies, such as the United Nations and Interpol, for technical and financial support can strengthen national capacities to address the issue.

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<sup>25</sup> ADF. "Illicit Weapons Trafficking, Manufacturing Fuels Lagos Violence." Africa Defense Forum, April 16, 2024. <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/04/illicit-weapons-trafficking-manufacturing-fuels-lagos-violence>

There are several challenges. Equatorial Guinea faces significant resource constraints, which limit its ability to effectively combat small arms smuggling. This includes financial, human, and technical resources. Persistent corruption within law enforcement and government institutions undermines efforts to control smuggling and enforce laws. Regional instability. Ongoing conflicts in neighboring countries continue to drive the demand for small arms, complicating efforts to curb smuggling.

Small arms smuggling in Equatorial Guinea presents a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach. Strengthening national law enforcement, improving border security, and enhancing regional and international cooperation are crucial steps in addressing this issue. Despite significant challenges, sustained efforts and commitment from both national authorities and international partners can lead to meaningful progress in combating small arms smuggling and enhancing security in Equatorial Guinea and the broader region.

Equatorial Guinea faces significant issues with illegal logging and wildlife trafficking, particularly in its tropical rainforests. Corruption within the logging sector and weak enforcement of environmental laws contribute to these problems.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the country is a hotspot for illegal fishing and the trafficking of endangered species like pangolins and primates. This is mainly due to its coastal geography with easy access to shipping routes that are largely unregulated.

Financial crimes, especially embezzlement and money laundering, are rampant among the ruling class. High-profile cases have involved international jurisdictions, highlighting the extent of corruption.<sup>27</sup> However, domestic efforts to address financial crimes are largely ineffective due to the involvement of high-level officials in these activities.

Equatorial Guinea's "Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Action Plan" is a comprehensive initiative aimed at improving governance and combating corruption within the country.<sup>28</sup> This plan, adopted in December 2019, focuses on several key areas:

Fiscal Governance: Enhancing public financial management and reducing inefficient spending.

Rule of Law: Strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring their effective implementation.

Regulatory Framework: Improving regulations to foster transparency and accountability.

Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT): Implementing measures to prevent financial crimes.

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<sup>26</sup> Browne, Caden, et al. *Illegal logging in Africa is a threat do Security*. The Conversation. (April 19, 2023). Illegal logging in Africa is a threat to security (theconversation.com)

<sup>27</sup> "Infrastructure in Equatorial Guinea." *The Borgen Project*. Accessed August 18, 2024. <https://borgenproject.org/infrastructure-equatorial-guinea/#:~:Despitedespite%20the%20country's%20inherent%20wealth,funds%20for%20health%20and%20education>.

<sup>28</sup> *Equatorial Guinea: Promoting Inclusive Growth, Improving Governance and Transparency*. International Monetary Fund News. (December 18, 2019) [Equatorial Guinea: Promoting Inclusive Growth, Improving Governance and Transparency \(imf.org\)](https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/12/18/eqg-promoting-inclusive-growth-improving-governance-and-transparency)

Anti-Corruption: Establishing mechanisms to detect, prevent, and punish corrupt practices.

The plan is part of a broader effort supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Equatorial Guinea.

Article 89 of the constitution of Equatorial Guinea establishes the independence of the judiciary. However, in practice judges are heavily influenced by the executive branch. Judges are constantly pressured to make politically motivated decisions.<sup>29</sup> Further, Article 92 of the constitution designates the president as the First Magistrate of the Nation.

## Specific Examples of Corruption in Equatorial Guinea

### **The Teodorín Obiang Scandal**

Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, the son of the President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, has been at the center of several corruption scandals. Known for his extravagant lifestyle, Teodorin has been accused of embezzling millions of dollars from the country's treasury<sup>30</sup>. In 2017, he was convicted in absentia by a French court for using state funds to purchase luxury assets, including a €107 million mansion in Paris, private jets, and a collection of Michael Jackson memorabilia.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Riggs Bank Scandal**

In 2004, a U.S. Senate investigation revealed that Equatorial Guinea's ruling family had deposited hundreds of millions of dollars into accounts at Riggs Bank in Washington, D.C. The investigation found that Riggs Bank had helped the Obiang family hide the origin of these funds, which were suspected to be embezzled oil revenues.<sup>32</sup> The funds were used to support their lavish lifestyle rather than improving the dire conditions in Equatorial Guinea.<sup>33</sup>

### **Misappropriation of Oil Revenues**

Equatorial Guinea is one of Africa's largest oil producers, yet the vast majority of its population lives in poverty. The Obiang regime has been accused of siphoning off oil revenues for personal use. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Justice, a significant portion of

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<sup>29</sup> Africa Integrity Indicators. "Explore the Data." *Africa Integrity Indicators*. (2024).

<https://www.africaintegrityindicators.org/data>

<sup>30</sup> "France: Equatorial Guinea Vice President's Conviction Upheld." 2021. Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch. July 28, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> "Equatorial Guinea Playboy on Trial in Landmark French Case." *The Peninsula*, December 31, 2016.

<https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/31/12/2016/E.Guinea-playboy-on-trial-in-landmark-French-case>

<sup>32</sup> Coleman, Norm, and Carl Levin. 2004. "PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE on INVESTIGATIONS MONEY LAUNDERING and FOREIGN CORRUPTION: ENFORCEMENT and EFFECTIVENESS of the PATRIOT ACT CASE STUDY INVOLVING RIGGS BANK REPORT PREPARED by the MINORITY STAFF of the PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE on INVESTIGATIONS RELEASED in CONJUNCTION with the PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE on INVESTIGATIONS' HEARING ON." MINORITY STAFF OF THE PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS.

<sup>33</sup> "Manna from Heaven: How Health and Education Pay the Price for Self-Dealing in Equatorial Guinea." *Human Rights Watch*, June 15, 2017.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/06/15/manna-heaven/how-health-and-education-pay-price-self-dealing-equatorial-guinea>

the country's oil wealth was being deposited into private accounts controlled by the Obiang family.<sup>34</sup>

## Foreign Asset Seizures

In addition to the Teodorín Obiang scandal, several countries have seized assets belonging to Equatorial Guinea's ruling elite, suspecting them to be proceeds of corruption. In 2012, Swiss authorities seized a collection of luxury cars belonging to Teodorín, valued at over \$25 million. These assets were linked to corruption and money laundering.<sup>35</sup>

## Corruption in Public Projects

There have been numerous allegations of corruption related to public works projects in Equatorial Guinea. Despite the country's wealth, basic infrastructure like roads, hospitals, and schools remain underdeveloped<sup>36</sup>. Contracts for these projects are often awarded to companies controlled by the Obiang family or their close associates at inflated prices, with much of the funds disappearing.<sup>37</sup>

## Analyzing Policy Success: Comparative Insights from Nigeria

Nigeria has many similarities with Equatorial Guinea as a nation of Western Africa that deals with problems surrounding corruption, kleptocracy and rampant transnational crime. There are also vast differences between the two nations including education access, infrastructure, wealth, and opportunity. A key difference is that Nigeria has seen greater amounts of success in combating these internal and external problems as seen by Nigeria's status in the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons report, as a Tier 2 country. This is in contrast to E.G. who is on Tier 3.<sup>38</sup>

Trafficking in persons remains a large issue within Nigeria, and takes multiple forms with some trafficking happening within the country in the form of urban-to-rural trafficking for labor and sex purposes as well as in the form of "baby factories" wherein trafficked women are forced to give birth and the babies are then smuggled and sold, often overseas. Human trafficking and smuggling also takes the form of men, women, and children being forced or leaving Nigeria of their own will only to be subjected to exploitation on their path often to the E.U. or the Middle East through other African countries, and sometimes into further exploitation at their destination.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "Department of Justice Seeks to Recover More than \$70.8 Million in Proceeds of Corruption from Government Minister of Equatorial Guinea." 2011. United States Department of Justice. October 25, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> BBC. (2023, February 13). "Equatorial Guinea vice-president's superyacht and homes seized in South Africa." BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-64627695>

<sup>36</sup> "Infrastructure in Equatorial Guinea." *The Borgen Project*. Accessed August 18, 2024. <https://borgenproject.org/infrastructure-equatorial-guinea/#:~:text=Despite%20the%20country's%20inherent%20wealth,funds%20for%20health%20and%20education.>

<sup>37</sup> "Manna from Heaven: How Health and Education Pay the Price for Self-Dealing in Equatorial Guinea." *Human Rights Watch*, June 15, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of State. "2023 trafficking in persons report: Equatorial Guinea." *Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons*, United States of America. (n.d.).

<sup>39</sup> Moronkeji Ogunwumiju, Helen. "Organized Crime and Human Trafficking in Nigeria." *The Pontifical Academy of Sciences* (2012)

In relation to the illicit drug trade within and expanding out of Nigeria, Nigeria still faces significant challenges. There is a particularly high occurrence of cannabis being produced and consumed within the country as well as illegally produced or obtained synthetic opioids such as Tramadol and Codeine based cough syrups. In terms of impact internationally, Nigeria is still a relatively high producer of methamphetamine that is trafficked both to other regions of Africa as well as to East Asia. Nigeria also deals with heroin and cocaine smuggling into and through its borders.<sup>40</sup>

Nigeria still deals with major problems in relation to arms and weapons trafficking particularly through the movement of weapons through the country into the Sahel region to the North of the country, and into countries to the South where territorial conflicts are prevalent.<sup>41</sup> This trafficking promotes and exacerbates regional conflicts by facilitating greater violence, and results in higher amounts of armaments within Nigeria to aggravate internal strife in the country.<sup>42</sup>

In terms of wildlife and extractive industry smuggling, Nigeria is widely acknowledged as a hub and transit point for much of the illicit market in Africa. Specific data shows that Nigeria is a particular hub for the trafficking of rosewood (often illegally logged), pangolins, and ivory some of which is in amounts that are far too great to have originated from Nigeria, but have been seized from shipments that show Nigeria as the source country.<sup>43</sup>

Nigeria has major problems with financial crime that are similar to Equatorial Guinea including money laundering and embezzlement that is exacerbated by high-level government corruption.<sup>44</sup>

## Nigeria Effective Policies for Comparison

### **The U.N. Convention Against Corruption**

The United Nations Convention Against Corruption is a legally binding international anti-corruption multilateral treaty. It covers many different forms of corruption, including bribery, trading in influence, abuse of functions, and various acts of corruption in the private sector. The Convention covers five main areas: preventive measures, criminalization and law enforcement, international cooperation, asset recovery, and technical assistance and information exchange. Nigeria ratified the UNCAC in 2004 and has since adopted various laws and policies to implement it. These include Code of Conduct for Public Officers (CCPO): A set of guidelines for ethical behavior by public officials. Code for Corporate Governance 2018: Promotes transparency and accountability in corporate practices. Voluntary Offshore Asset Return Scheme:

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<sup>40</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Strengthening the Forensic Chemical Analysis Capacity of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA),” accessed August 17, 2024,

<sup>41</sup> Jesse, Genevieve. “Arms Trafficking: Fueling Conflict in the Sahel.” *The International Affairs Review*, July 12, 2024.

<sup>42</sup> ADF. “Illicit Weapons Trafficking, Manufacturing Fuels Lagos Violence.” Africa Defense Forum, April 16, 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Energy Information Administration (EIA), “Nigeria: Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC),” accessed August 17, 2024,

<sup>44</sup> World Justice Project. “Monitoring and Fighting Corruption in Nigeria: A Year of Impact with TransparencIT.” 2023. World Justice Project. October 4, 2023.

Encourages individuals to repatriate illicitly acquired assets. National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS): A comprehensive approach to combat corruption.<sup>45</sup>

## **Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria**

The Code of Conduct for Public Officers in Nigeria is outlined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Some key provisions include that public officers must avoid situations where their personal interests conflict with their official duties. They cannot receive emoluments from multiple public offices simultaneously. Certain high-ranking officials, including the President, Vice-President, and Governors, are prohibited from maintaining bank accounts outside Nigeria. Retired public officers cannot hold certain positions or receive additional remuneration from public funds. Public officers should not accept gifts or benefits related to their duties, except for customary personal gifts from relatives or friends. The Code of Conduct Bureau enforces these rules to maintain high standards in government conduct.<sup>46</sup>

## **The Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance (2018)**

The Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance 2018 seeks to institutionalize corporate governance best practices in Nigerian companies. The Code highlights key principles that promote public awareness of essential corporate values and ethical practices that will enhance the integrity of the business environment. The Code was released by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) of Nigeria on January 15, 2019. The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has the authority to enforce compliance and take appropriate actions against companies that fail to adhere to the code. These penalties may include fines, sanctions, or other regulatory measures. It's essential for companies to prioritize governance practices to avoid such consequences.<sup>47</sup>

Voluntary Offshore Asset Return Scheme is an opportunity for Nigerian relevant persons and their intermediaries to voluntarily and conveniently regularize their offshore assets held anywhere in the world by paying a one-time levy as fine for the years of irregularity.<sup>48</sup>

## **National Anti-Corruption Strategy**

An initiative was started nearly ten years ago to foster courtroom transparency and stimulate citizen participation in judicial processes to promote accountability and advance the rule of law. The project has been successful in reducing the amount of time it takes to resolve a case. The organization submits recommendations to the National Judicial Council to address violations by judicial officers and challenges delaying trials. It also hosts an online database that

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<sup>45</sup> United Nations, UNODC. "Nigeria's Implementation of the 2014 and 2019 United Nations Convention against Corruption Review Recommendations" (2022, December). Retrieved April 1, 2024, from [Nigerias\\_Implementation\\_of\\_the\\_2014\\_and\\_2019\\_UNCAC\\_Review\\_Recommendations\\_UNODC.pdf](#)

<sup>46</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria. *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999* (As Amended). Lagos: Federal Government Press, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria. "Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance 2018." January 15, 2019. Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance 2018 | ECGI.

<sup>48</sup> Voluntary Offshore Assets Regularization Scheme. "Voluntary Offshore Assets Regularization Scheme." VOARS. Accessed August 15, 2024.

tracks corruption cases, some of which are used by policy makers. The public can also use the database to vet prospective business associates who may be charged with corruption or fraud.<sup>49</sup>

### **U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement**

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement is active in many developing countries around the world with the sole focus of curbing International Narcotics trade and promoting stable and effective judicial systems and law enforcement bodies. In Nigeria, this Bureau has aided in the establishment of multiple systems including the creation of a taskforce solely devoted to curbing wildlife trafficking, and promoted and funded the implementation of multiple pieces of technology including a transcription software program for Nigerian courts to more efficiently process cases, both of which have allowed for the country to not only promote peace and stability, but also enforce compliance with a set system, limiting the influence corruption can have on these activities. INL has had many projects and successes in Nigeria, some of which lends useful comparison to possible avenues for intervention in Equatorial Guinea.<sup>50</sup>

### **US Involvement in Equatorial Guinea**

The U.S. policy stance towards Equatorial Guinea is complex and influenced by several factors, primarily related to governance, human rights, and geopolitical interests. Historically, the United States has had significant economic ties with Equatorial Guinea, particularly through American oil companies investing heavily in the country from the early 2000s. However, this relationship has become strained due to concerns over human rights abuses and the autocratic rule of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has been in power since 1979. The U.S. prefers a political change in Equatorial Guinea, unlike China, which supports the current regime without imposing conditions related to governance or human rights.

In recent years, Equatorial Guinea has been leaning more towards China for economic and political support. China's non-conditional assistance and backing of Obiang's regime. The escalating influence of China in Equatorial Guinea has diplomatic consequences for the United States, especially when it strives to create a comprehensive strategy in Africa. The construction of infrastructure and investment activities in China-Equatorial Guinea's economic relations support China's political influence in this area. Besides, through soft power tools like cultural exchanges and academic programs, China strengthens bilateral ties<sup>51</sup>. Such a growing diplomatic foothold brings challenges for the efforts to Crush Chinese influence and enhance the United States' strategic interests in Africa, how it might lead to the weakening of traditional alliances, and the decrease of the United States' diplomatic leverage in the region. Moreover, the United States can have trouble retaining the classical alliance given that countries of Africa prefer modern development by China rather than old ties with the United States. The evolving pattern of diplomatic relations reiterates the imperative for the United States to reevaluate its diplomatic

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<sup>49</sup> Choji, Timothy and Abuja. "Federal Executive Council approves new Anti-Corruption strategy document." Voice of Nigeria (November 22, 2023)

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: Nigeria Summary." U.S. Department of State. Accessed August 15, 2024.

<sup>51</sup> Nantulya, Paul. Grand Strategy and China's Soft Power Push in Africa." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*. (August 30, 2018).

approach in Africa and come up with concrete plans that can checkmate Chinese influence and maintain its ties with the important state partners in that region.

Additionally, China's diplomatic enticing activities in Equatorial Guinea and other African countries are the lens that could bring more influence and cut down the U.S. in world politics. China's goals include developing more diplomatic dealings and starting up economic/business collaborations to lift itself and claim its rightful place among the countries determining the world's destiny. However, this rivalry between the U.S. and China for diplomatic influence also means that the U.S. may face an uphill task in furthering its diplomatic interests and that it needs to prioritize and cultivate strong diplomatic and strategic alliances in order to control China's growing influence.<sup>52</sup> While China employs soft power that increases its diplomatic status in Equatorial Guinea and Africa in general, as time progresses, the U.S. has to innovate the way it handles diplomatic issues to ensure that it can compete with China and remains one of Africa's leaders.

Concerning China's diplomatic initiatives and soft power impact, the United States' response strategy is to deepen strategic engagements and collaboration activities in Equatorial Guinea. Subsequently, the U.S. should minimize the influence of the rapidly increasing Chinese presence. The channel utilization for diplomacy, aiding in development efforts, and instilling democracy and good governance as a part of American interests and values are emphasized here. Creating strategic partnerships alongside allies and other organizations in the region would further strengthen America's diplomacy and diminish the role of China in Equatorial Guinea and other countries in the same region. By action orientation and investment into long-term diplomatic relations with African countries, the United States can successfully counter Chinese influence and their strategic interests in Africa protection.

The balance between promoting democracy and not pushing Equatorial Guinea closer to communism has been delicate due to Equatorial Guinea's economic and diplomatic ties with Russia and other Soviet Era countries. The U.S. government has consistently expressed concerns about human rights abuses and the lack of democratic processes in Equatorial Guinea. It often calls for improvements in these areas, including fair elections, freedom of expression, and the release of political prisoners. Equatorial Guinea is a significant oil producer, and U.S. companies have substantial investments in the country's oil and gas sector. The U.S. aims to maintain a stable economic relationship while encouraging transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources. The U.S. engages in security cooperation with Equatorial Guinea, focusing on maritime security, counterterrorism, and regional stability. This includes training and capacity-building initiatives. While direct U.S. development assistance to Equatorial Guinea is limited, the U.S. supports international efforts to improve health, education, and infrastructure in the country.

## Discussion on Policy and Security Implications

When analyzing the key findings of this research and its accompanying implications, it is important to recognize that there are multiple limitations on this research in terms of a lack of information that is truly available on the topic of Equatorial Guinea in relation to its government

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<sup>52</sup> Brazinsky, Gregg A. "U.S.-China Rivalry: The Dangers of Compelling Countries to Take Sides." *United States Institute of Peace*, March 2023. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/us-china-rivalry-dangers-compelling-countries-take-sides>.

corruption and current relation to other international crimes. Our data is gathered from as wide a variety of reliable sources as are currently available including the United Nations, different U.S. executive agencies and other international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. There is a distinct lack of information on this country as compared to others in the region, but we do have relatively high trust in the conclusions drawn in this report.

In terms of policy recommendations, we have incorporated both soft options geared towards promoting the relationship between Equatorial Guinea and the U.S. as well as hard options, meant to impose either punitive measures against Equatorial Guinea or increase its responsibility for its actions on the international stage. In terms of effectiveness, our group believes that softer options may prove more effective in the long term as hard options have in the past, and currently are, being faced with a lack of response from the leadership of Equatorial Guinea.

To emphasize this point we can look at how in February of 2023 the vice president of Equatorial Guinea's superyacht was seized by South African courts as collateral for a crime against a South African citizen. In retaliation to this seizure, two days later, two South African engineers in Equatorial Guinea were arrested, tried, and later convicted to 12 years in prison with no evidence, according to reports.<sup>53</sup> It is expected that this arrest and conviction was in direct response to the seizure of the superyacht.

This story is one of many in which Equatorial Guinea responded negatively to shows of force by other countries, and with the current U.S. policy goal of pulling equatorial Guinea away from Russian and Chinese influence, it is highly likely that any attempt to punish or instill oversight on this regime would have an adverse effect of pushing them further away from the U.S., and western influence.

## Policy Recommendations

One area in which Nigeria has seen some improvement in handling issues of kleptocracy and transnational crime is in the area of promoting education, both of the citizenry and of law enforcement. By educating the public, the government has the opportunity to move the workforce more towards skilled labor which in a functioning licit economy, allows citizens to work towards greater independent wealth and away from the necessity to participate in both corruption and the illicit economy as a whole.

When analyzing the impacts of training and education of law enforcement, we can look towards the efforts of both Interpol and the U.S. Department of State. There are other agencies involved but examples can be found wherein Interpol has given seminars and instruction to Nigerian law enforcement in order to increase their ability to respond to transnational threats. The U.S. Department of State, via the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) has funded programs to train Nigerian law enforcement on how to more effectively handle maritime piracy cases and increase their capacity to respond to wildlife trafficking by aiding in the establishment of a Special Wildlife Crime Unit.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Maritime Executive, "Equatorial Guinea May Be Holding S. African Engineers over Seized Yacht," accessed August 15, 2024,

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: Nigeria Summary," accessed August 15, 2024

Looking at the effectiveness of training and education in both the citizenry and law enforcement in Nigeria, gives good indication that such measures can have a positive effect on Equatorial Guinea due to current knowledge of the base education level of the country and by admitting the similarities in forms of transnational crime and corruption that both Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea face. The United States can adapt similar forms of intervention in Equatorial Guinea such as funding training programs for law enforcement, assisting nonprofits that operate in the region with a goal of promoting literacy and education, and sponsoring Equatorial Guinean law enforcement officers to attend global summits on relevant topics and issues faced by the country.

A straightforward method that was implemented in Nigeria, is to fund efforts to combat trafficking of goods and people, and support law enforcement initiatives in order to reinforce the benefits of combating these issues via a monetary incentive from the United States. The U.S. government has in other countries funded the implementation of different programs that focus on a broad range of issues spanning ground-level enforcement via funds and equipment necessary to combat criminal activity and act as a deterrent and spreading all the way to the judiciary of the country where funding and support can be used to implement faster processing of cases, maintain more accurate records, and aid in the prosecution of crimes such as human trafficking in order to move from a Tier 2 watchlist country to a Tier 2 country on the U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report. Equatorial Guinea, as a kleptocratic regime is highly motivated by monetary incentives, and by having stipulations accompany these funds, U.S. policy can have at least some impact on Equatorial Guinea in order to promote both the U.S. agenda in the country as well as promote peace and stability in the country.

Another way that U.S. policy can be used to combat transnational crime and kleptocracy in Equatorial Guinea is through the promotion of research in the country on the impacts of corruption and transnational criminality and how it affects all levels of the country. Research may not have a direct effect on elements of crime and corruption but it would give greater insight to analysts and policymakers into the key issues faced by the country and build stronger relationships within Equatorial Guinea that would reinforce the U.S. relationship with the country.<sup>55</sup> While not having a hard impact or necessarily a greatly quantifiable effect on Equatorial Guinea, by promoting research and devoting resources to the country, the U.S. is enforcing the idea that it has a vested interest in the country as a whole, and has the opportunity to increase its soft power reach with the populace of Equatorial Guinea, which in the long term can greatly influence the amount of importance the relationship that Equatorial Guinea has with the U.S. and thereby the impact that U.S. policies overall can make.

Another option for policy makers include the imposition of sanctions on the country for failing to follow their commitment to the U.N Convention Against Corruption and for human rights violations in the country. These sanctions may prove useful in the short term to combat human rights violations, but may impact long term relations with the country and result in further

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<sup>55</sup> Gauttam, Priya, Bawa Singh, Sandeep Singh, Shankar Lal Bika, and Raghavendra P. Tiwari. "Education as a Soft Power Resource: A Systematic Review." *Journal of International Education* 45 (3): 123-145. Published March 15, 2024. Accessed on PubMed. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10806264/>.

movement towards Russia and Chinese influence, which would work against current U.S. policy goals.

The other harder option available is to implement some form of oversight on the country, particularly in relation to the corruption in the government of the country. Per a stipulation on a loan from the IMF, Equatorial Guinea is supposed to have an official in the government acting as an overseer in order to limit corruption, but due to current legal frameworks and massive delays in the hiring office, this office has either been unfilled or lacking proper enforcement capacity. So far any attempts for oversight from international bodies have been met with limited interaction and criticism from the government.

Given our current understanding of U.S. policy goals in Western/Equatorial Africa, and knowledge of Equatorial Guinea and how it has reacted to foreign involvement in the past, any efforts at a harsher policy, such as sanctions or oversight, will likely be met with aggression and distrust. This would have an impact that is contradictory to the goals of the U.S. hence we propose focusing on building a stronger relationship with the U.S. via actions like promoting education and research and building U.S. soft power in the region in order to hopefully work towards a more stable and peaceful Equatorial Guinea.

## Conclusion

This project analyzed the current state of Equatorial Guinea in terms of its prevalence of kleptocracy and transnational crime including drug, arms and human trafficking along with others. We found that there are many examples of government corruption and that it has severe and long-lasting effects on the country as a whole and how it reacts to, and suffers impact from, transnational crime. The ruling family of Equatorial Guinea has shown over the last four decades that it cares little for the well-being of its citizens and instead insulates the country's wealth and power for themselves at the expense of their people. Past efforts to curb this corruption have been ineffective and are often met with retribution by the country.

We also analyzed the current state of Nigeria in relation to kleptocracy and transnational crime, and while we have found that they still pose significant issues for the country, we have also seen the steady improvement in the country on these fronts. We have also seen how Nigeria responds differently to international involvement in their country and have taken the resources given to them and made lasting changes in the country in recent history. We took many of these policy changes utilized by the United States and other international bodies and adapted them to better fit with the current state of affairs in Equatorial Guinea along with current U.S. policy goals.

Our research indicates that softer policy initiatives such as promoting research and education in Equatorial Guinea will yield better results given the history of the country and how it responds to international actions. This in turn would increase U.S. soft power in the country and aid in further U.S. efforts to diminish corruption in the country, curb transnational crime, further democracy in the country, and bring Equatorial Guinea closer to the West and away from Russian and Chinese influence.

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This article by the BBC details the case of a South African businessman that won a wrongful detention case against the vice-president of EG, who subsequently had property seized to pay compensation. There has been no comments from the EG government as of the publishing of this article.

2. Browne, Caden, et al. *Illegal logging in Africa is a threat to Security*. The Conversation. (April 19, 2023). Illegal logging in Africa is a threat to security ([theconversation.com](https://theconversation.com))

African countries lose billions of dollars each year to illegal logging. In Equatorial Guinea, the president's son profited from the transport and export of rare hardwoods.

3. Federal Republic of Nigeria. "National Ethics and Integrity Policy." Abuja: Federal Government of Nigeria, (2020). [ncc.gov.ng](https://ncc.gov.ng).

The guidance and policy given by the federal government of Nigeria on the overarching ethics and integrity standards that the government and officials are expected to adhere to.

4. Global Edge. "Equatorial Guinea: Statistics." Global Edge. Accessed March 16, 2024. <https://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/equatorial-guinea/statistics>.

This website breaks down some common economic statistics for countries worldwide. On the EG page, there are sections on people, energy and other common resources.

5. Human Rights Watch. "Equatorial Guinea." Equatorial Guinea | Country Page | World | Human Rights Watch. (2019, April 9). <https://www.hrw.org/africa/equatorial-guinea>

Human Rights Watch is a global non-profit that follows human rights violations in different parts of the world. This is their page on EG and documents the known human rights violations and trends of the current regime.

6. *Equatorial Guinea: Promoting Inclusive Growth, Improving Governance and Transparency*. International Monetary Fund News. (December 18, 2019) Equatorial Guinea: Promoting Inclusive Growth, Improving Governance and Transparency ([imf.org](https://www.imf.org))

The International Monetary Fund and Equatorial Guinea came to an agreement that focuses on governance and anti-corruption reforms. The aim is to support the recovery of the economy and promote sustainable and inclusive growth.

6. Organized Crime Index. “Comparison of criminalities between South America and Equatorial Guinea - the organized crime index.” The Organized Crime Index | ENACT. (n.d.-a). [https://ocindex.net/region/south\\_america/equatorial\\_guinea](https://ocindex.net/region/south_america/equatorial_guinea)

This website allows for country and continent comparisons of criminality of many varieties. We have selected a comparison particularly between EG and South America. This is generated by the OCI, and breaks down criminality into many separate sections with our group paying specific attention to the categories of human trafficking and human smuggling.

7. Organized Crime Index. “Criminality in Equatorial Guinea - the organized crime index.” The Organized Crime Index | ENACT. (n.d.-b). [https://ocindex.net/country/equatorial\\_guinea](https://ocindex.net/country/equatorial_guinea)

The OCI ranks Equatorial Guinea very low on their index, mainly due to corruption in the government, weak law enforcement, porous borders and the government facilitation of criminal activities. There is little effort within the country to combat these issues or to mitigate these risks.

8. Pekula, M. “Top 4 Facts About Human Trafficking in Equatorial Guinea.” The Borgen Project, December 16, 2019. <https://borgenproject.org/top-4-facts-about-human-trafficking-in-equatorial-guinea/>

This Borgen Project report talks about the four key facts on human trafficking in EG emphasizing EG’s role as both a source and a destination for trafficking people, the main population being women and children. Economic inequality, weak law enforcement and limited resources all hinder grassroots efforts to combat human trafficking in EG.

9. Thelwell, Kim. “5 Facts about Child Poverty in Equatorial Guinea.” The Borgen Project, January 12, 2023. <https://borgenproject.org/5-facts-about-child-poverty-in-equatorial-guinea/#:~:text=Equatorial%20Guinea%20is%20the%20third,Guinea’s%20population%20lives%20in%20poverty.>

The Borgen Project’s report on child poverty in EG talks about how even though there was/in high economic growth due to oil revenues, 75% of the children in the country live in poverty. This is indicative of the urgent intervention that is needed to improve the lives of the young population.

10. United Nations. “UNODC global report on trafficking in persons: crises shift trafficking patterns and hinder victim identification.” (2023, January 24). *UNODC.ORG*. Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2023/January/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons-2022.html>.

The UNODC report on trafficking in persons focuses less on the different countries individually like the Department of State report, and more on the overall trends of human trafficking around the world. The report also analyzes how different events such as war have impacted trafficking in persons.

11. Verite. “Trafficking Risk in Sub-Saharan African Supply Chains.” Verité. (2023, November 8). <https://verite.org/africa/explore-by-country/equatorial-guinea/>

Verite’s study on trafficking risk in Sub-Saharan African supply chains highlights the vulnerability of workers, mainly migrant workers, due to limited poverty and job opportunities. High risk industries like agriculture, mining and domestic work (all of which are prominent sectors in the Equatorial Guinea economy) exacerbate human trafficking risks.

12. U.S. Department of State. “2023 trafficking in persons report: Equatorial Guinea.” *Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons*, United States of America. (n.d.). <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/equatorial-guinea/>

The trafficking in persons, or TIP report, is the Department of State annual report on human trafficking and human smuggling worldwide and maintains a classification system for countries and Tier 1, 2, or 3 depending on their current efforts and successes in combating the trafficking of persons into and out of their country. Equatorial Guinea in 2022 rose to a tier 2 country and in 2023 fell back to a tier 3 country for its lack of measures in handling human trafficking and prosecuting offenders.

13. U.S. Department of State. “2024 trafficking in persons report: Equatorial Guinea.” *Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons*, United States of America. (n.d.).

The annual U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons report detailing Equatorial Guinea's current status as it relates to trafficking in persons within the country, its current level of enforcement and legislation on issues pertaining to the topic and where the U.S. currently views

E.G.'s efforts to combat trafficking. Equatorial has been upgraded this year to Tier 2 Watchlist due to its enforcement efforts.

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This article outlines the different types of financial crimes that plague the Nigerian economy and the impacts that they have.

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