

CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS

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ABSTRACT: *This study was aimed at examining corruption and democratic governance in Nigeria. One of the greatest threats to socio-economic and political development of any nation is corruption. Democratic governance on the other hand is based on the will of the people and it is generally agreed that it is the best form of governance suited for allowing people to live in dignity and freedom, a point that was articulated in the Millennium Declaration by the international community. With huge resource expansion, unparalleled and unprecedented corrupt practices, it is unthinkable to expect democracy to thrive and derive dividend therein. Not only are things very stressful and difficult but the design and reality of democratic governance appears more of a mirage. All these hinge on either ethics or morality. The choice is either democracy or corruption as they are diametrically opposed to each other. This unenviable status continues to assert negatively on the State and the growth of democracy despite the several strategies put in place by past and previous regimes to combat the scourge. The study adopts secondary sources of data collection for overall understanding of the subject matter. Literatures were gathered from works of scholars in the area of investigations under review. The paper argues that for corruption to be curtailed in Nigeria, the constitutional provisions which fosters constitutionalism, rule of law should be effectively enforced. The paper sums up with conclusions and other vital policy recommendations for effective democratic governance in Nigeria.*

KEYWORD: Corruption, Democracy, Democratic Governance.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most daunting problems which have stunted the growth of Nigeria democratically and advance its stability is the lack of adherence to ethos, rule of law and constitutionality (Orji 2016). For nearly 58 years since it gained independence, Nigeria has found it difficult to attain democratic stability despite efforts by past administrations to achieve this feat. The inability of Nigeria's past and present leadership to consolidate on the gains of democracy has been attributed to corruption. In general terms, corruption has eaten very deep and hence, found its way into the body polity of the Nigerian state so much so that virtually all spheres of the nation's life stinks with the sores of corruption. The effects of corruption on the socio-economic, cultural and political landscape of Nigeria government can be so devastating that nothing meaningful works in the midst of this malaise. Corruption therefore becomes a clog in the wheel of progress of any nation state if the menace is not controlled.

Over the years, the Nigerian Mass Media have uncovered and revealed to the nation cases of corruption on a massive scale, a situation that is not only highly abhorred but reprehensible to well-meaning Nigerians. However, the ugly practice persisted and has steadily made very deep in-roads in every spheres of our national life (Okonkwo, 2011). Virtually all private, public and political spheres have been permeated and contaminated by corruption. This kind of development as pointed above compelled Preye and Weleayam (2011) to argue that Nigerians

no longer believe that honesty and integrity are not worthy principles since one can do very little or even do nothing at all to gain so much. The school of thought of Preye and Weleayam on the high degree of ineptitude and indolence in the attitude of Nigerians further confirms the fact that corruption is not a thing of the leadership alone. The followership is also guilty as it is culpable for this misdemeanor. Thus, one finds corruption showing its face in the affairs of the family circle, schools (primary, secondary and universities and other higher structures of learning); worship places, the bureaucracy, security outfits, market places, main stream politics, village meetings, women organizations, electoral activities, appointment of persons into public offices; the manner and character in which funds are disbursed from the centre to states and local councils, rigging of elections, and many more. All of these stages and categories of corruption have over the years constituted themselves into a huge albatross bedeviling the Nigerian state. Corruption whether political, economic, judicial, familial, institutional or bureaucratic could by and large impede the progress of any society where such attitudes are widely tolerated and accommodated in the scheme of things.

In the midst of all these strands of corruption, it can be said that political corruption predominates. And this area of study constitutes the potential problem of this research. This is because those at the helm of affairs of government, the political elite accounts for the sharing and/or allocation of values in the society. The misallocation of these values and resources seem to be at heart of Nigeria's socio-economic problems upon which a multidimensional social vices the country passes through today rests.

The Nigerian government has taken various measures and strategies to address the incidence of corruption and bad governance in the country. These measures includes public service reform (monetization to reduce waste and reduction or over-bloated personnel, reform of public procurement); establishment of anti craft agencies (such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent Corruption and other Practices Commission (ICPC) and the on-going sanitization in the Nigeria National Petroleum Co-oporation (Adeshina, 2015).

Despite the successes attained by these institutions, the situation remains palatable as corruption continues to permeate and pervade every facet in our society and national life in Nigeria (Fatile, 2013). Against this backdrop, this study is to examine corruption and democratic governance in Nigeria and state its dare consequences on good governance and social-economic development and provide possible solution to this menace. Therefore this study will be subdivided into four sections. The first section is the introductory note. The second is the basic concepts of the paper, i.e. corruption, democratic governance. The third is the nexus between corruption and democratic governance in Nigeria and then the conclusion and the way forward.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION/LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Corruption

The greater democratic challenge facing Nigeria is corruption. Corruption is "efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means – private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit (Lipset et al, 2000). In addition, corruption is a behavior, which deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private gains - regarding (personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gains.

In the same vein, Nye (1967), views corruption is a deviation from the formal duties because of private gains. This includes such behaviour as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in position of trust); nepotism (appointment because of relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private regarding use). This definition will be very difficult to operate, where corruption is widespread and regarded as the norm by majority of the people. Similarly, Otite (2000) views corruption as the perversion of integrity, which could be presented in acts such as bribery, inordinate favours or moral depravity. It occurs when two or more parties interact to upturn the structure and processes of a society. It is concerned with the behaviour of functionaries which promote dishonest situations. The World Bank (2009) defined corruption as an abuse of public office for private gain, where an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. Corruption is also an abuse, whereby private agents actively offer bribes to upturn public rules and processes for individual/personal advantage and profit. Corruption can also be depicted in acts such as patronage and nepotism, theft of state assets or diversion of state resources. The Vision 2010 Committee views Corruption as inordinate activities geared towards the changing of the normal course of judgments and position of trust (Otite, 2000). The Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000 also define corruption to include bribery, fraud and other related offences (Otite, 2000). Khan (1996) stated that corruption varies from one nation to another. It can thus be defined as “a perversion or change from the general accepted rules or laws for selfish gain”. The United Nations on its part defines corruption as the abuse of power for private gain, while Transparency International chose a clear and focused definition of the term as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (CLEEN Foundation, 2010). This is a very wide-ranging definition, which delineates some of the acts of corruption. Otite (1986) defines corruption as the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity. This definition is broader because it involves the moral aspects of official conducts. The Transparency International views corruption as the negative behaviour of public officials, either politicians or civil servants, whereby they enrich themselves or their cronies unlawfully, through the misuse of public power which has been entrusted to them (Pope, 1996). The definition Transparency International is quite descriptive, though it focuses only on the public sector. However, there is corruption in the private sector too, which has negative consequences for the whole society. Furthermore, Ogundiya (2009) gave a very broad picture of the concept, stating that certain behaviours could be used to highlight corruption. These acts were given as embezzlement, conflict of Interests, bribery, fraud, rigging of elections, misappropriation, and conversion of public funds for personal gains, extortion, and manipulation of procurement processes, diversion, and misappropriation of funds through manipulation or falsification of financial records.

Action Aids (2008), on its part views corruption as dishonest acts which should be avoided by the good people of any nation. It suggests that the society should disapproval of anyone who engages in corrupt practices instead of what obtains in Nigeria, whereby corrupt politicians and public officials are indirectly applauded and sometimes celebrated with traditional titles and national Honours. Such abuse should be met with sanctions in a developing nation like Nigeria, who should be in a hurry to develop and catch up with the rest of the developed world.

Classification of Corruption

Private Corruption: By private corruption, we mean people outside government, private individuals engaging in unethical acts. These could be individuals outside organizations who commit acts of immorality (perversion, show of dementia, and acts of fraud or scamming). The

other groups of people is persons in the organized private sector who may loot or carry out other acts of fraud in their companies or who colludes with those in government to perpetrate sharp financial practices.

Private corruption has manifested in Nigeria as everyday bribery to obtain a desired objective, breaking of traffic laws, piracy, plagiarism, alteration of school grades, illegal inflation of petroleum pump prices by dealers, robbery, sexual gratification for higher grades or promotion, et cetera.

Public Corruption: This is the familiar corruption that takes place in government or by government officials and their accomplices in the private sector. Another name for public corruption is official, grand or institutional corruption. This is the kind of corruption involving public office holders. In this case, persons in position of authority exploit the position to take from the commonwealth.

- i. **Political corruption:** This is the kind of corruption that obtains in the three arms of government in a democratic rule, namely, executive, legislative and judiciary. Corruption at this level is the highest because it involves state fund. The issues of personal and primordial attachments in appointment, award of contracts; as well inflation of contract monies, embezzlement of funds, and misappropriation of fund are critical examples of public corruption in the executive. The Federal cabinet in Nigeria has in recent times been in the news for high profile bribery scandals (the former minister of petroleum Alson madueke and others). The judiciary becomes vulnerable when it looks away from an obvious case of crime, tries to downplay the veracity of a crime, or commits travesty of justice for a particular political interest. The Federal Court of Appeal has been in a state of crisis for sometime leading to the suspension of its president on alleged complicity in election cases involving some western states which the president was said to have served the interest of a political party (Ketefe, 2012).
- ii. **Bureaucratic corruption:** Corruption here is still at the level of government. It involves the technocrats and civil as well as public servants who implement government policies. These include the leadership and personnel in ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). The corruption at this level is the worst as the allocation, release and use of money is executed by these government offices. The staff are the ones that propose and submit financial needs of the units or projects and they are the ones that transfer and effect payment. Corruption becomes rife at this point (Buhari, 2015). We have had cases of heads of ministries and parastatals busted and arraigned before competent courts and tribunals on charges of high profile stealing and fraud. Bureaucratic corruption also manifests in favouritism and nepotism in appointment, promotion and reward systems in public offices. Some persons get rapid promotion and rewards on the basis of family, friendship, ethnic or religious affiliations to the boss; while some never get promotion because of such frivolous considerations.
- iii. **Military corruption:** This was obtainable in Nigeria during military dictatorship. Ironically, the military was an institution that saw itself as a corrective regime in the face of bad leadership and festering corruption. That was the original intention of the army when they struck in January 1966. But we also know that the counter-coup of July was an ethnic-motivated coup meant to avenge the assassination of some persons of northern extraction in the first coup. With this mentality, professionalism that formed the fulcrum of the “corrective” notion of the institution began to fade out as corruption gradually crept

in. By 1971, the military had become debased as all sorts of allegations were raised against General Gowon's military ministers and state governors. It got worse with the Babangida and Abacha regimes which came under the spotlight as the two most corrupt leaderships in the country (Folarin, 2014).

- iv. Other forms of institutional corruption: The other forms of institutional corruption include that in the media and entertainment industries and even in the labour movement. The media is particularly known for the graft or 'brown envelope' syndrome in which news reports are only publishable when certain individuals or groups in the story pay their way; or when an image polishing is done for those who can pay the reporter for it; or negative stories are stepped down when money has been paid to destroy such story. In the entertainment industry, persons for musical or movie auditions may have to "sort" or "settle" with money or sexual gratification to be given roles in films even when they are good or very bad. Labour groups are sometimes compromised by government not to embark on industrial action or to betray the cause of the movement by "sorting" labour leaders through the fattening of their accounts (Folarin, 2014).

Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the factors responsible for corruption are many and varied. While a lot of literatures have emerged on this issue (see, Dike, 2005; Abdullahi, 2010; Onuoha, 2009a; Akintola, 2010; Omonobi, 2008; Isiwu, 2008, etc), for our purpose in this write up, we will simply highlight them. The two (2) major dimensions are:

- a. Socio-political and cultural dimension.
- b. Ethno-religious fractionalization dimension.

These two (2) broad dimensions can further be collapsed into the following:

- I. Obsession with materialism and compulsion for a short-cut to affluence.
- II. Open display, glorification and approbation of ill-gotten or looted national wealth.
- III. Lack of ethical standards among government agencies and institutions.
- IV. Poverty, greed and poor reward system for hard work.
- V. Response to societal and extended family pressures and departure from old societal norms and value system.
- VI. Lack of access to economic opportunities.
- VII. Ineffective taxation system and bad rules and priorities.
- VIII. Lack of clear conception of ethical demands of official positions due to irreligiousness.

Consequently, these factors also have myriad effects on the generality of the population.

The Concept of Democratic Governance

The concept of democracy was coined from the Greek words "Demos" (the people) and "Kratein" (to rule). Thus, democracy is a political system whereby the people of a society rule

through any form of government they choose to establish; hence it is generally regarded as the “government of the people by the people and for the people”. In modern democracies for instance, supreme authority is exercised for the most part by representatives elected by popular suffrage. The representative may be supplanted by the electorates according to the legal procedures or recall or referendum, and they are at least in principle responsible to the electorate. In many democracies like that of USA which Nigeria is imitating, both the executive and the legislature are elected, while in typical constitutional monarchies like UK and Norway, only the legislature are elected and from their ranks, a cabinet and a Prime Minister are chosen. Consequently, in a democracy, the officials directly reflect the known or ascertained views of their constituents, sometimes subordinating their own judgement (Encarta Dictionaries).

On the other hand, Pierre and Peters (2000) state that the concept of governance is notoriously slippery, frequently used by social scientists and practitioners without a concise definition. Nevertheless governance implies the efficient management of state institutions. Issues of public accountability, transparency in government procedures, rule of law and public sector management are emphasized. According to (Stoker, 1998), governance is the acceptable face of spending cuts. It is the political construct of a minimalist state. Governance is also seen as the process of steering state and society towards the realization of collective goals.

Governance is an act controlling the affairs of the nation by making decisions and executing them on behalf of the citizens. It is the activity of governing a country or controlling a company or the way in which a country is governed or a company or institution is controlled (Hornby, 2000). Governance is the process of decision-making by which decisions are carried out.

Democratic governance is the science of organizing government at all levels and the process of coordinating direct mass and popular people’s participation in affairs that relate to the totality of their wellbeing. Hence, the democratic way of governance, of course, involves competitions for various government positions, people’s participation in choosing political leaders as well as the guaranteeing of human rights.

Social and economic wellbeing of the people constitutes part of the crucial issues of democratic governance as much as the participation of the people. Again, the nexus between human rights and democratic governance on the one hand and the ability to provide and sustain socio-economic wellbeing on the other brings about the essence and framework which support the growth and development of democratic institutions, norms and values in the entire political system.

A democracy that is meaningful to people is that which positively affects at least their social and economic wellbeing. Thus, these economic and social impacts suggest the primacy of the political objectives of the whole democratization process. However, to ensure broad participation of the people and attach legitimacy, democratic principles and procedures as well as protection of human rights are essential ingredients for genuine and transparent democratic governance.

The political empowerment of the poor people, of women in general, of minorities, are all more important than further strengthening of elite dominated democratic institutions. Empowerment of poor is a precondition for their actual participation in political decision-making and for giving them real opportunities for influencing their own future (Martinussen, 1996).

Further elaborations regarding democratic governance centered on economic and social preconditions are indeed extended to the threshold of poverty and hunger which invariably inhibit people's effective participation towards exercising their democratic rights. It is argued that the existence of healthy and endowed people ensures the existence of healthy, genuine and sustainable democracy. These will promote and consolidate democratic governance.

The nexus between corruption and democratic governance in Nigeria

As earlier stated from the preceding literatures, corruption finds expression in the misuse and abuse of public office for private or pecuniary purposes. From the onset, we said that this brand of corruption involves the violation of public trust which in itself is a negation of the collective social contracts entered into between the governed and those at the helm of affairs of state. It takes place in two phases. On the one hand, it involves unwholesome cornering or diversion of public funds into private coffers through the instrumentalities of primitive accumulation with impunity by the public office holder. On the other hand, it shows itself in the arbitrary use of ill-gotten wealth and the forceful application of state powers to either perpetuate itself in office or maintain status quo by every available means necessary. Preye et al (2011) asserted that this form of corruption takes place at the level of political decision making arena and even at the sphere of electioneering activities.

It was Paul, (1997) who alluded that the nature, scope and potential for corruption may vary from one polity to another. This is so because it is only by making reference to legal norms that the basis for politically corrupt act can be identified.

In another dimension, democracy, which has formed the basis for corruption today in Nigeria, may be described as a form of government under which the electorate exercise governing power directly or through their representatives periodically elected by them (and in most cases selected by the powers that be). Any political clime may be termed democracy only if it provides enabling institutional framework for the expression and, in the final analysis, the supremacy or otherwise of the popular will of the electorates on the basic question of social direction and policy (Anofowose and Enemuo, 1999; Paki and Inokoba, 2006). Conversely, the critical element of democracy include, but not limited to constitutional rule or what has been variously christened 'rule of law', conduct of free and violent free and fair elections, protection of minority interest and freedom of citizens (but within the specifications of the law); creating conducive environment for the realization and/or actualization of citizens aspiration and, above all, relative provisioning of human existentials for the benefit of the greatest number (Erunke, 2012).

Accordingly, Heater (1964) concurred with the views of Anifowose and Enemuo (1999), Paki and Inokoba (2006) and Erunke (2012) about the fundamental importance and tenets of a democratic society when he averred that democracy is essentially a method of organizing society politically, economically and socially with all its essential ingredients been put into consideration as a formidable pillar that sustains such societies. Heater (1964) then outlines five variables without which a society cannot tag itself truly democratic. They include equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human right and human life, the rule of law within the context of fairness and/or prudent use of state resources for the overall enjoyment of the teeming populace.

Fighting corruption is a necessary foundation for democratic governance and the rule of law, which are the building blocks of sustainable development in a country (TNV, 2014). In Nigeria,

public roles and responsibilities are usually entrusted to the public office holders by the people in a quest for good governance, especially in the current democratic system. Most of the times, this trust has been corrupted whereby these public roles and resources were used for private benefits. Taking a holistic look, the World Bank (2000) has identified three distinct aspects of governance, which are hereby used as indicators in analysing the effects of corruption on democratic governance in Nigeria. These are;

- i. The form of political regime, which refers to the degree of democratization in the country;
- ii. The degree of accountability in the management of the nation's economic and social resources for national development;
- iii. The capacity of governments to identify, formulate and implement development policies. This relates to the competence of government.

Effects of Corruption on Nigeria's Democratic Governance

The existence of corruption in a democratic society (Nigeria inclusive) is perceived as an aberration. This is because the actual practice of democratic principles rest squarely on the legal code of society. Thus, the existence of high incidence of corruption tends to have more serious consequences on democracies more than any form of government. This is so because it poses dangerous omen to the principles of democracy. There is a strong consensus among scholars that suggests that corruption does no good to democracy. Consequently, corruption erodes and corrodes the meaning, mechanisms and the very essence of democracy. Again, corruption breaks the link and people's power to influence collective decisions, contribute input into the system, affects voting pattern, generates general apathy for meaningful participation (Mark, 2007) and basically overheats the polity due to public disaffection and disenchantments. Most societies especially, the North African axes have degenerated into chaos, anarchy and even avoidable war and terrorism due to what has been generally perceived as elitist misguided quest to stay on in power eternally, or even because of clear-cut cases of poor governance orchestrated by corruption. By way of extending the argument from the foregoing, since political corruption is a deviant behavior that inhibits the rules and tenets of democracy, it also poses dangerous threat to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Corruption has a devastating effect on the Nigeria because it hinders any advance in democracy. Corruption wastes resources by distorting government policy against the interests of the majority and away from its proper goals. It turns the energies and efforts of public officials and citizens towards easy money instead of productive activities. It hampers the growth of competitiveness, frustrates efforts to alleviate poverty and generates apathy and cynicism. The harms caused by corruption, which are as numerous as the shapes corruption can take, have destroyed well-intentioned development projects as well as undermined good governance and development in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD.

In conclusion, corruption is responsible for the Nigeria's lack of good governance, poor growth and development as well as decay in morals and values. It is useful to observe that corruption is a serious menace to effective democratic governance is an understatement. Indeed, corruption is a major factor responsible for the nation's comatose state of underdevelopment

despite the abundant wealth. Corruption can destroy a State, its political establishment as well as development advances built up over generations thereby retarding economic and social progress for decades to come. As argued above, it is almost impossible not to be corrupt in Nigeria as both the leaders and the citizens find it absolutely impossible to restrain from cutting corners. The resultant consequences include an impoverished economy with enormous negative impact on the poor. Indeed, because of corruption, the citizens have lost trust in the political system, its institutions and leadership hence the violent clashes and litigations that usually trail election results. Arising from the above, this paper further proffers the following recommendations:

Firstly, for democratic governance to thrive in Nigeria, the people must be vigilant and demand accountability from the leaders. It has been proven that „the strength of a democracy is only as great as the will of the people to uphold it.“ for all these to be possible the citizens must be politically educated and mature. This would enable the future leaders to make ethical decisions and for the people to begin to make political office holders accountable while within and outside office.

Secondly, foreign countries that aid and abet corrupt practices in the area of money laundering should support Nigeria in its fight against this activity by confiscating such monies and returning same to the country. Also, legislative enactments that will domesticate the international charters, convention and protocol on corruption in Nigeria should be passed by the National Assembly without delay.

Thirdly, constitutional provisions which fosters constitutionalism, rule of law should be effectively enforced, as well as the need for the various arms of government, especially the legislature and the judiciary to be alive to their constitutional responsibilities.

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