

Corruption: The bane of Nigerian democracy

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Abstract

Nigeria's growing democracy has been undermined by high level of corruption in all facets of Nigerian political system. Corruption is the abuse of bestowed power or position to acquire a personal benefit. Corruption makes democracy dysfunctional, especially when it is institutionalized. Democracy is supposed to be a leveller when it concerns dividends of democracy. A situation where only the elites and a favoured few are seen to be enjoying its dividends and the large majority who actually did the voting to elect the leaders continue to wallow in poverty; with lack of infrastructure is an invitation to chaos. The spate of corruption in Nigeria has found expression not only in public offices and institutions but other critical social milieu namely, the family, schools, places of worship, electioneering activities. This study is a theoretical analysis of the concept and context of corruption and its effects on democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Marital Satisfaction, Employed Women, Housewives.

Introduction

There are many unresolved problems in Nigeria, but the issue of the upsurge of corruption is troubling, and the damages it has done to the polity are astronomical. The menace of corruption leads to slow movement of files in offices, police extortion at tollgates and slow traffics on the highways, port congestion, queues at passport offices and gas stations, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities, among others. Even the mad people on the street recognize the havoc caused by corruption - the funds allocated for their welfare disappear into the thin air. Thus, it is believed by many in the society that corruption is the bane of Nigerian democracy. Consequently, the issue keeps reoccurring in every academic and informal discussion in Nigeria. 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.

Concept of Corruption and Democracy

Corruption, according to Harsh (1993) ^[2], is a practical problem involving the outright theft, embezzlement of funds or other appropriation of state property, nepotism, and granting of favours to personal acquaintance. It has been argued that corruption involves behaviours which deviate from the moral and constitutional requirements. Kalu (1991) ^[3] conceives corruption as the conscious and well planned act by a person or group of persons to appropriate, by unlawful means, the wealth of another person or group of persons. Corruption can also be seen as diversion or resources from the betterment of the community to the gain of individuals at the expense of the community. Odey (2002) ^[6] contextualizes corruption in Nigeria as the air which every living person breathes in and out. According to him, nobody makes any effort to breathe in the air; it comes naturally. Corruption, in Nigeria, has become so naturalized that many of us simply becomes corrupt without making any effort and often even without knowing it. Olopoenia (1998) ^[7] put this definition in a broad perspective of three categories as thus: Theoretically, the literature

distinguishes among political, bureaucratic and economic corruption; practically however, these three typologies are no more than different perceptions of the same monster. But all these manifestations are motivated by the desire to use the instrumentality of office for private gains for the benefit of the official, his relations, ethnic group or friends at the expenses of the general good.

Democracy on the other hand is defined by The Vienna Declaration on Human Rights (1993) ^[9] states as based on "the freely-expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives." Olowu (2001) ^[8] defines it as a system of governance that underscores the plural nature of politics and hence gives recognition to the diversity of social forces in any political community.

Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

The causes of corruption are multiple and have been discussed by scholars under numerous headings but I will briefly discuss some of the major causes that we have identified as investigators as some of the common causes of corruption in a political economy.

Weak Institutions: First, we have identified weak institutions as a major cause of corruption. Corruption has a high propensity to thrive when legal and political institutions are weak and government policies generate economic rents. In most climes, there are so many incentives in the public sector, particular administrative and legal institutions that leave public officials with wide unrestricted authority and powers to create avenues for unjust enrichment or use the discretionary powers at their disposal to manipulate the system. According to the World Bank Report; "the normal motivation of public sector employees to work productively may be undermined by many factors, including low and declining civil service salaries and promotion unconnected to performance. Dysfunctional government budgets, inadequate supplies and equipment, delays in the release of budget funds (including pay), and a loss of organizational purpose also may demoralize staff. The

motivation to remain honest may be further weakened if senior officials and political leaders use public office for private gain or if those who resist corruption lack protection. Or the public service may have long been dominated by patron-client relationships, in which the sharing of bribes and favours has become entrenched. In some countries pay levels may always have been low, with the informal understanding that staff will find their own ways to supplement inadequate pay. Sometimes these conditions are exacerbated by closed political systems dominated by narrow vested interests and by international sources of corruption associated with major projects or equipment purchases”.

Rules and Criminal Justice System: Closely related to the issue of weak institutions is the role of formal rules and the criminal justice system. There is hardly any country where corruption is legalized; to the contrary, there are several formal rules and laws prohibiting corruption and corrupt practices with appropriate sanctions and punishments. Essentially however, the incentive to engage in corruption and corrupt practice is stronger where the probability of being discovered or prosecuted is remote or non-existent.

Public Perception: Another cause of corruption is public perception. Corruption is supported when some/few societal culture promotes corruption. Why should a convicted corrupt individual be offered a chieftaincy title by traditional rulers? Why do governors, some of whom have been fingered in corruption be given awards or be elected into the senate? There are also other instances where religious institutions have ordained corrupt public officials and sometimes organized thanksgiving services for corrupt ex-convicts who are just being released from prisons.

The Nature of the Economy: The nature of the economy is also a crucial factor. It has been argued that rent-seeking or rent-based systems tend to promote corruption. If this view holds, then, because the Nigerian economy is based on rents from crude oil and gas, it follows that there would be a number of “leakages” that would allow for the easy flow of cash and favours, sometimes in illegal ways.

Materialism: Obsession with materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, *glorification* and approbation [of ill-gotten wealth] by the general public, are among the reasons for the persistence of corruption in Nigeria (Ndiulor, 1999) ^[5]. It has been noted that one of the popular, but unfortunate indices of good life in Nigeria, is *flamboyant affluence* and *conspicuous consumption*.

Low Ethical Standards: The lack of ethical standards throughout the agencies of government and business organizations in Nigeria is a serious drawback. According to Bowman, *ethics* is action, the way we practice our values; it is a guidance system to be used in making decisions. The issue of ethics in public sector [and in private life] encompasses a broad range, including a stress on obedience to authority, on the necessity of logic in moral reasoning, and on the necessity of putting moral judgement into practice (Bowman 1991) ^[1]. Unfortunately, many officeholders in Nigeria (appointed or elected) do not unfortunately; have clear conceptions of the ethical demands of their position.

Poor Reward System and Greed: Other factors are poor reward system and greed; Nigeria’s reward system is, perhaps, the poorest in the world. Nigeria is a society where national priorities are turned upside down; hard work is not rewarded, but rogues are often glorified in Nigeria.

Poor Attitude to Work: The lukewarm attitude of those who are supposed to enforce the laws of the land (judges, police officers and public officials) could lead to people engaging in corrupt behaviour, knowing full well that they would get away with it.

Corruption and its effects on Nigerian Democracy

Many studies have been conducted that show the evils or consequences of corruption. And corruption has taught the Nigeria a dangerous and wrong lesson that it does not pay to be honest, hardworking and law-abiding.

1. Corruption is a destructive of governmental structures and capacity. *The NEWS*, in its July 11, 1999 issue *The Face of a Liar*, broke the news of “forgery” and “perjury” committed by the former *Speaker of the House of Representatives*, *Alhaji Ibrahim Salisu Buhari*. Through corrupt means, *Alhaji Ibrahim Salisu Buhari* amassed wealth (he made millions working for *NEPA*), and bribed his way to the fourth highest position in the land. This scandal dominated the political agenda of Nigeria for some time. It is a national shame that a crook was in-charge of the *House of Representatives* – the body that makes the laws of the land. What type of laws could he have made for Nigeria? The ‘*Buharigate*,’ as the scandal was later called, nearly destroyed Nigeria’s democratic experiment.
2. Corruption can destroy the legitimacy of a government. The *Shehu Shagari* administration was written off as inept because of the magnitude of corruption in the administration, and its lack of policy direction. Corruption may alienate modern-oriented civil servants and may cause them to reduce or withdraw their service or to leave the country. Corruption is one the reasons for the ‘*brain drain*’ phenomenon in Nigeria (talented professionals leaving the country in search of employment somewhere else). In Nigeria, you can hardly enter an office and get your ‘file signed except you drop’ some money.
3. Corruption upsets ethnic balance, and exacerbates problems of national integration. For instance, if a corrupt but popular ethnic leader is replaced in his or her position, it may upset ethnic arithmetic’ and the cohorts may revolt.
4. Another consequence of corruption is that it creates the condition for political instability. This is because unrestricted corruption makes the state an unlimited allocator of wealth to individuals and groups. This character of the state makes it possible for the politics of do-or-die to take root, with politicians struggling to out-compete one another sometimes in violent manner.
5. Corruption also has other social costs apart from poverty. As rightly noted by Myint (2000) ^[4], in “any society, there are laws and regulations to serve social objectives and to protect the public interest, such as building codes, environmental controls, traffic laws and prudential banking regulations. Violating these laws for economic gain through corrupt means can cause serious social harm.”

Recommendations

1. The *mass media* has a crucial role to play in the campaign to educate the people of their rights as citizens, and in exposing the rogues. Nothing chills *nonsense* more than exposure to thin air. The nation should erect permanent structures in the society to constantly tackle corruption, instead of setting up *ad-hoc* corruption-panels here and there. The citizens have a role to play in the war against corruption: they should always try to resist the temptation to offer bribes to corrupt government officials, as 'it takes two to tango.
2. To win the war on corruption, adherence to ethical standards in decision-making must be the foundation of the nation's policies. Without ethics (set of moral principles or values or principles of conducts governing an individual or a group). And to win the war on corruption Nigeria has to fortify the institutional 'checks and balances among the country's major social forces and the separation of powers within the government' (Dahl 1998). The nation has to make sure that those entrusted to execute the war on corruption are men and women of *virtue* - those who recognize and always do what is right.
3. The constitution of the land must be respected and obeyed to the letter. Every rule guiding the behaviours of public officials are domesticated in the 1999 constitution. The onus is for the political head to act in accordance with the dictates and injunctions of the law. This will foster accountability and probity.
4. Also, all anti-graft agencies namely, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should be strengthened. By implications, the body should be made autonomous and independent of politicians at whatever level – be they federal, state and local government.
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Conclusion

Corruption, in all its ramifications, is the one single factor that has been holding our country back for decades; that has not let Nigeria and Nigerians fulfil their God-given potentials; that has not let our enormous wealth and resources work for or benefit all of us, but a few rapacious, evil clique. State of emergency has to be declared on the war against corruption in Nigeria,

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