HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 7. NO 1. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Political sector corruption, the bane of sustainable development in post-independent Nigeria: An historical perspective

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Abstract

Right from the ages, the phenomena of corruption and corrupt acts have constantly afflicted human societies. Corrupt acts include negative behaviours which people exhibit or manifest in the course of inter-personal relationship such as stealing, cheating obsessive profligacy, fraud, deceit and blackmail. This paper argues that abject poverty and continued under development traits currently exhibited by our country-Nigeria is traceable to corruption. The paper affirms that poverty of leadership in the Nigerian political scene has legitimized corruption in all social formations since political leadership in most Black African countries is anchored on bribery, corruption and wastage of public funds. This paper critically examines the impact of political sector corruption on national development. Finally, the paper suggests different measures that can be taken to reduce the spate of political sector corruption and consequently promote sustainable development. For the purpose of achieving this paper's set objectives, historical and thematic research methodologies were adopted. Equally, researchers ensured historical objectivity by adopting inter-disciplinary approach in 'content analysis" and also relied on secondary sources of data collection.

Key words: Corruption, political Sector, sustainable development.

Introduction

Corruption too and political or ideological manipulation are essentially contrary to the truth. They attack the very

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> foundations of social harmony and undermine the possibility of peaceful social relationships.[4].
>
> If there is anything which operates differently, uniformly and smoothly all over the country. It is the twin engine of the machinery of corruption and bribery. The phenomena of corruption and bribery seem to be our unofficial ideology, our lingua franca, the universal language which is spoken and understood in every nook and cranny of Nigeria. [5]

Since the pre-colonial period, the phenomena of corruption and corrupt acts had afflicted Nigerian societies in different dimensions. For instance, during the pre-colonial period, social vices like stealing, cheating, fraud, deceit and blackmail were very minimal because the social and economic super structure hinged mainly on farming, trading and indigenous crafts. There is no gain saying the fact that pre-literate societies in Igboland operated almost at the level of zero- corruption because its people kept to the rules and norms, respected the cultural practices of the period which were regarded as sacrosanct and necessary for the peaceful co-existence, and stability of pre-literate communities in the pre-independent era.

Political sector corruption permeated into Igboland when the British colonial government in Nigeria appointed so called "warrant chiefs" to assist Colonial District Officers in superintending the affairs of village communities in Igboland. Those appointed were for the most part, upstarts, people smart or bold enough to come forward to meet the White Colonial District Officer. They quickly established a regime of credible corruption, rapacity and oppression.[6]

Historians, political scientists and development experts have blamed the twin evils of indiscipline and corruption, which have stunted genuine development efforts in Nigeria on the poverty of political leadership in black Africa since after independence. Political leadership in many African countries including Nigeria has been replete with poor leadership anchored on bribery, corruption and financial profligacy. Similarly, Eze Nwokereke[7] argues that for some decades, Nigeria had not been opportuned to enjoy the dividends of good and exemplary leadership, be it military or civilian who have the interest of the people at heart and also ready to sacrifice personal gains for the greater number of the citizens. In the same vein, Chinua Achebe feels that endemic corruption that currently plague the Nigerian society can be traced to failure of political leaderships and corruption. Achebe's views about the corrupt Nigerian social milieu are extensively quoted below;

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[4]S.K. Uzoukwu, Wise Teacher *John Paul II An Anthology* (Owerri: Martins Continental Co. Ltd, 2002),58.

[5] Campbell, S. Momoh, *Philosophy of New Past and Old Future* (Auchi, African Philosophy Projects Publication, 1991)115.

[6] Ben, O. Nwabueze, "The Igbos in the Context of Modern Government and Politics in Nigeria: A call for Self-Examination and self-correction, ii) *Ahiajoku Lecture Series* (Owerri: Government Printing Press, 1985) .14.

[7]EzeNwokereke, "The causes of corruption in Nigeria and the way forward", in Christopher.O. Ugwu (ed.) *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives. A Book Reading* (Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers, 2002) 5

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

> ...The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely, a failure ofleadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land andclimate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problemis the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to theresponsibility, or to the challenge of personal example, whichare the hallmark of true leadership...[8]

Similarly, Nuhu Ribadu bemoans the spate of endemic corruption in the Nigerian state by asserting that corruption is the reason for Nigeria's underdevelopment. It is also the reason for our pariah status and unfair judgement passed on the Nigerian state as a rogue nation. Presently, corruption in the political sector has devastated the Nigerian socio-economic environment in different forms like inflation of contracts, money laundering, oil bunkering, election rigging and political godfatherism etc.[9]The leadership of many African countries whether civilian ormilitary has always coveted the culture of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, tribalism, bribery and corruption and gross mismanagement of public funds. These traits result in widespread corruption. Corrupt leadership and utter contempt for the rule of law has made the monster called corruption to become a norm or a way of life in Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria is principally nurtured in selfishness and gross disrespect for the rule of law.

Corruption Perception Index (CPI) prepared by *Transparency International* (TI) in September 2000 placed Nigeria on top of the corruption table worldwide stressing that corruption has so permeated the public and private sector in Nigeria to the extent that the social plaque could pose a serious threat to democracy, political stability and socio-economic development. In 1997, also, *The Transparency International* still used Corruption Perception Index (CPI) to rank Nigeria as the most corrupt country in the world.[10]

Similarly, the International Community startled by the endemic nature of institutionalized corruption has stigmatized the Nigerian social environment as a den of corruption. Global organizations that monitor international fraud in different parts of the world have continued to rate Nigeria poorly in the areas of good governance and financial accountability. *Transparency International (TI)* states that Nigeria occupies the ignoble position as the fifth corrupt nation in the world Corruption perception Index (CPI) report of 2005.[11]

Post-independent governments have waged endless unsuccessful wars against corruption through different Institutional Agencies. For example, Shagari's

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[8]Chinua,Achebe. *The Trouble with Nigeria*, (Enugu, Fourth DimensionPublishers,1983)1
[9]NuhuRibadu, Corruption: The Trouble with Nigeria, Lecture Series Presented at the 3rd Media Trust AnnualDialogue at LadiKwali Hall, Sheraton, (Jan 19, 2026)*http://www.gamji.com/article 5000/news5520.htm*Retrieved, 27-09-2026.
[10]Ignatius, E. Ukwaba, "Political Corruption in Nigeria: An Assessment of the Second and FourthRepublic" in Christopher, O. Ugwu (ed.) *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspective A Book of Readings*(Nsukka-Nigeria:Chuka Educational, 2002) 29.
[11]*Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index* (CPI) "Bribe Payers Index and Global Corruption Barometer"Transparency.org https://www.transparency.org (1st July, 2005) Retrieved 07-10-2006

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Ethical Revolution, Buhari's War Against Indiscipline (W.A.I) and Babangida's Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), achieved little or no success. However, the war against corruption took a different dimension during the tenure of ex-president Mathew Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo used two important Anti-Graft Commissions – the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to wage moral war against corruption.

This paper seeks to analyze how political sector corruption dwarfs development efforts of third world countries in the African continent. It will also provide valuable answers to certain pertinent questions; Why are Nigerian leaders and their followers corrupt? When did political sector corruption creep into the Nigerian body politic? What are the possible consequences of political sector corruption on national development? What measures should the Nigerian government adopt to reduce the spate of political sectorcorruption?

Conceptual Clarifications

- **Corruption**

Corruption as a concept means different things to different individuals and scholars. A.U. Agha identifies corruption with the Latin word "corruptio" which means to decay, to be depleted, to rot, to degenerate, to dessicate, to waste away and to loose dignity and integrity. It is a denial of justice, fairness and good will. To Agha, corruption is anti-developmental since it negates all virtues and principles of life and stresses more on deprivation of the rights of the citizenry.[12] Obasanjo, defines corruption as... the misuse of public power for private and personal benefits...[13]

Similarly, J.S. Nye[14], F.A. Ndubusi[15], C.U. Agalamanyi[16], and Ribadu[17], see corruption as any act by a public official which violates the accepted standards of behaviour in order toserve private or selfish ends. The end which this behaviour will serve maybe social, economic or political. The standards could be legal or conventional. The emphasis on the violation of such legal or conventional norms for private gain, would include gains in cash or kind for one-self, one's relatives or friends.

[12]Agha, U. Agha "A Forward" in Christopher, O. Ugwu (ed.) *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspective A Book Readings* (Nsukka-Nigeria: Chuka EducationalPublishers, 2002) x

[13]Olusegun Obasanjo, "Key note Address" in Ayodele, P. Aderinwale (ed.), *Corruption, Democracy and Human Rights in West Africa* (Abeokuta: Africa Leadership Forum (ALF), 1994) 24

[14]Joseph, S. Nye, "Corruption and Political Development: A Cost Benefit Analysis", *American Political Science Review*(June 1967) 417-427 *https://www.cambridge.org* Retrieved 07-10-2006.

[15]Felix, A. Ndubuisi, *Nigeria What Hope?* (Enugu: Cecta (Nig) Press Ltd, 1991) 22

[16]Christopher, U. Agalamanyi, "Corruption: A focus on the Nigerian Economy" in Christopher, O. Ugwu (ed.) *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspective. A book of Readings* (Nsukka-Nigeria: Chuka Educational Publishers, 2002) 51

[17]NuhuRibadu, "Corruption: The Trouble with Nigeria"

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- **Political Sector Corruption**

Political sector corruption is said to occur when political office holders without recourse to the rule of law engage freely in dishonest acts such as bribery, embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, favouritism, flagrant abuse of political office and money laundering activities. Political sector corruption has legitimized such vicious acts like inflation of contract awards, misappropriation of public funds, election rigging, and perversion of justice.

Sustainable Development:

Michael Todaro conceives development as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structure, attitude and institution as well as the acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty.[18] In essence, development must represent the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system strive to actualize diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a situation of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.[19] Development also occurs when a more exploitative social order is replaced by a less exploitative social order or when an exploitative social order is replaced by a non-basic exploitative social order.[20] Development has core values such as the ability to meet basic needs like food shelter and protection, self-esteem, freedom from servitude, the sense of emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and from social servitude to nature, ignorance, misery and dogmatic beliefs.[21]Sustainable development thrives when a human society has political leaders who optimally harness or exploit the natural resources of the society thereby paving the way for marked improvements in the living standard of the citizenry. Also human societies are deemed to enjoy sustainable growth or development when political leaders enable citizens of the polity to possess the capacity, skill and entrepreneurial will to realize their inherent potentials and cope with the changing circumstances of their lives. Sustainable development in a polity or state presents when the government in power undertakes measures to steer human instincts for self-preservation for the good of all stake holders.[22] Every developed country that has sustained prosperous economy always has a form of government that is good and creates room for increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being for its citizens.[23]

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[18]Michael Todaro, *Economics for a Developing World: An Introduction to Principles, Problems and Policies for Development* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1980) 96
[19]Todaro, *Economics for a Developing World*, 96
[20]Ahmed,Bashiru, "The Role of Politics in the Development of the Niger Delta" in Akinjide, Osuntokun. & Victor Ukaogo (eds.) *Niger Delta Politics of Despair, Deprivation and Desperation* (Lagos: ICS Services, 2012) 330
[21]Abraham. N. Thomas, *The Praxis of Development and Underdevelopment,* (Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Company, 2015) 31
[22]Innocent Asouzu, *IKWA OGWE Essential Readings in Complementary Reflections; A Systematic Methodological Approach*, (Calabar: Saesprint Publishers, 2007) .91
[23]Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, 1986) 10

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Theoretical Framework

The researchers of this paper adopted the "Elite Theory" in their quest to present a vivid theoretical analysis of political sector corruption and how this social malaise dwarf sustainable development in the Nigerian state. Elite Theory was co-founded by three key figures of the *Italian School of Elitism* at the twilight of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These classical political theorist include Pareto Vilfredo[24],Mosca Gaetano[25], and Michels Robert[26]. Vilfredo, developed the concept of the "circulation of elites" that explains how governing elites rise and fall, and get replaced by a new ruling elite overtime, Gaetano, postulated that all human societies are divided into two classes, the ruling minority that is the "elite" and the non-elite majority that is the "non-elite" while Robert formulated the "iron law of oligarchy" which states that all complex organizations regardless of how democratic they start eventually turn into rule by a small group known as the elite class".[27]

Critically, elite theory is a theory of state that seeks to explain power relations in any human society. The theory posits that power in larger societies especially nation-states is concentrated at the top in relatively small elites, that power flows predominantly in a top-down direction from "elites" to "non-elites" and that the characteristics and actions of "elites" are crucial determinants of major political and social outcomes[28]. The "elites" simply believe that they have the ability to determine what constitute public welfare and policies that should be taken to achieve it rather than the masses. Thus, public policies flow down wards from the "elites" to the masses or "non-elites".[29]The basic characteristics of the elite theory are that power is concentrated in the hands of unified "elites" who are asa result of their background and positions exert significant power over government and societal decisions while the "non-elites" are diverse and powerless.[30]

The "elite theory" postulates that every state has two social groups namely "elite" and "non-elite" or "counter elite". The "elite class" wields both economic and political power and as well control the means of production while "non-elite" are the lower and middle class who are mainly wage earners and peasants. The "elite class" always enjoy the quest for material acquisition and in their bid to dominate the "non-elite" group always get themselves involved in

[24]Pareto Vilfredo, *The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1975) *http://en.wikipedia.org/wi* Retrieved 08-10-2026
[25]Mosca Gaetano, *The Ruling Class* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc, 1939), *http://en.wikipedia.org/wi* Retrieved 08-10-2026
[26]Michels Robert, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (Leipzig: Verlag Von Werner Klinkhardt, 1911) *http://en.wikipedia.org/wi*
[27]Wikipedia, "Classical Elite Theorists and Their Theories" (June 2005) *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/*Retrieved April 2024
[28]Jan, Pakulski "The Development of Elite Theory"in Heinrich Best & John Higley (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) 9-16
[29]Batcheson, Mgbachi& Sunday Akor, *An Introduction to Public Policy Analysis for Nigerian Students* (Owerri: DFC Publishers, 2014) 23
[30]DavitaSilfenGlassberg& Deric Shannon, *Political Sociology: Oppression, Resistance and the State* (London: Pine Forge Press, 2011) 15

corruption and corrupt acts. As political office holders and business moguls, they misappropriate public funds. The "elite class" endless desire for material wealth at the expense of the "non-elite" creates room for social inequality between them and the "non-elite" who always find themselves at the receiving end of poverty. Thus, the constant devaluation of the "non-elite" can give room to counter culture of savagery and social malaise like armed robbery, banditry, ritual killings, kidnapping, gangsterism, bureaucratic and institutionalized prodigious squandering, political thuggery, rigging of elections and autocratic approach to governance.[31]

Relating the "elite theory" to the endemic political sector corruption that has dwarfed sustainable development in the Nigerian polity and Igbo land, the homo-religious Africannus was not very corrupt because African religious world and cosmology demand that a certain moral order be maintained to ensure peace, prosperity and long life. In the same vein, political sector corruption was unknown in the traditional African setting because both priestly and political positions were never keenly contested for, but were acquired by due process of age and heredity.[32]

The colonial and neo-colonial periods led to the total despoliation of African values and its consequent replacement with European values which were embedded in western education, Christianity and urbanization. Western education and Christianity led to the emergence of a highly stratified society, namely the "rich class" or "the elites" and the "peasant class" or "non-elite class", the "educated class" (whether highly educated, literate or semi-literate) and the "uneducated class". Aschristianity and colonialism penetrated into African countries, the "rich" or "elite class" and the "educated class"dumped the core African values of honesty, love, contentment and truthfulness in the bid to entrench their economic and political dominance over the peasant or "non-elite" class, and embraced western values of greed, avarice, get-rich-quick attitude and mindless European individualism. These negative attitudinal paraphernalia established a social milieu whereby the "elites" created the monster of corruption, rapacity and kleptocratic approach to governance.

Lending credence to the monopolistic, domineering and over-bearing attitude of the "elite class", Alex Thomson[33], posits that "elite class" not only control and dominate the commanding heights of the economy, exercise legal monopoly over the means of coercion, dominate structures and institutions of politics and economy, but also shape the ideological and philosophical direction of society. Most human societies are elite directed and controlled because they play significant role in defining or recognizing important policy issues and deciding which and what should receive priority in relation to others. Evidently, the new Nigerian "elite" which took over power from the colonial authorities adopted

[31]Anthony E. Nkwocha, *Trend and Perspectives in History of Education Book One From Earliest Times to 1960* (Owerri: Standard NigerianPublisers, 2012) 22
[32]Jude,Uwalaka, "The Legacy of African Traditional Religious Humanism for the African Renaissance Project"*Religion in a World of Change: African Ancestral Religion, Islam and Christianity, International Symposium* (2007) 15
[33]Alex Thomas, *An Introduction to African Politics* (London: Routtedge, 2004).58-83

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the development ethos of the departed colonial administration and also manifested self-interested exploitation of the people and country[34].For instance, the Nigerian "elite" who served during the First Republican administration were very much concerned with the distribution of power between the organs of government and failed to fully understand the ends of power and how political power can be used to serve public interest. This wrong notion of democratic governance made the "political elite" of the first republic to seek power and use it for personal aggrandizement thereby legitimizing large-scale mismanagement of public fund.[35]

Regrettably, Nigerians of different tribes and tongue have bemoaned high spate of unbridled corruption that has ravaged the Nigerian polity since the attainment of independence in October 1960. Lending his voice to the whims of political sector corruption, a renowned international scholar, novelist, and literary icon, Achebe, argues that Nigerians are- all living witnesses to the failure of helpless integrity to solve the problem of rampant corruption which threatens to paralyze the Nigerian state in every sinew and every limb.[36] He also reiterated the harm posed by leadership failure and corruption by arguing that the absence of sustainable development in the Nigerian state can be traced to the twin evil of leadership failure and endemic corruption. A basic element of this misfortune that has continued to plague the Nigerian society is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers- who have shown great tendency towards pious materialistic woolliness and self-centered pedestrianism.[37]

Corruption has existed in most human societies as a result of Psychological egoism. In so far as the "elites" and "non-elites in the Nigerian polity are naturally selfish and materialistic, they must be haunted by intense lust for money, power and glory. The quest for material acquisition meant to satisfy one's egoism results in unhealthy rivalry and corrupt acts among the "elite" and "non-elite". Preponderance of unhealthy rivalry breeds class distinction and corruption. Political theorists like Thomas Hobbes cited in Nina Rosenstand[38] has advanced an argument that the only way to moderate interpersonal relationship between the "elite class" and "non-elite class" is through the propagation of the ideal of "ethical egoism" which counter-balances the negative effects of psychological egoism. Hobbes, *Leviathan* made a case for the establishment of a just society in the following manner;

[34]Chris, C. Ojukwu& James, O. Shopeju, "Elite Corruption and the Culture of Primitive Accumulation in 21st century Nigeria" *International Journal of Peace and Development Studies*2no.2,(2010) 15-24, *http://www.academicjournals/ijpds* Retrieved on 24-09-2026.
[35]Anthony E. Nkwocha& Cynthia, C. Offor., "Historical Education as a Sine-Qua-Non for Sustainable Democracy in Third World African Countries: The Nigerian Experience" *A Critique of Nigerian Democracy Proceedings of the International SymposiumOrganised By Whelan Research Academy for Religion, Culture and Society*, (2019) .31.
[36]Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*.35
[37]Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* 13
[38]Nina Rosenstand, *The Moral of the Story: An Introduction to Ethics Third Edition* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000) .131

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

> …Humans are selfish by nature, and society is our best way to protect ourselves from each other. Justice is a concept that is only to be found in a society once the rules are laid down prior to the creation of society in the state of nature in which people live in a perpetual state of war against each other; life is miserable and short, and no rules apply except for self-preservation. In order to improve on our personal life conditions for no other reason, we chose to live by the rules of society…

Hobbes asserts that in every stable and corrupt free society and in consideration of a better inter-personal relationship between the "elites" and "non-elites", a just society can only be actualised when "ethical egoism" based on the philosophy of "impossibiliumnullaestobligatio" (no body has a duty to do what is not possible) should always prevail against psychological egoism[39].

An Historical review of Political Sector Corruption in Nigeria since the Post-Independence Era:

The tragedy of African politics since after independence is traceable to corrupt African political elites who are highly involved in squander mania. Many scholars in Africa and Nigeria are of the opinion that the leadership class in Nigeria lack moral administrative courage to tackle corruption. Lucius Ugorji, bemoans this unfortunate development in the Nigerian political scene in this manner:

> ….We must acknowledge the existence of poor governance inmost countries in Africa because of the sheer incompetence, the moral bankruptcy and lack of vision. We must declare that the corruption level of many politicians in Africa has gone beyond scales and measure. The masses watch with deep concern how their national resources are stolen by some of their unscrupulous leaders and stashed away in foreign banks with the active connivance of Western Bank officials...[40]

A leader must not try to cushion himself (by amassing wealth) against the future. Though the temptation is great, there is nothing more counterproductive in leadership than corruption…[41]. Similarly, Kwashi Benjamin writing in *This Day*, accused the political class and Nigerian leaders across different strata of the society as being responsible for the increasing wave of corruption in the country. He argued thatas long as Nigerians and indeed, Africans continue to paylip service to fighting corruption, without purging themselves first, the menace of corruption will continue to live with us.[42]

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[39]Rosenstand, *The Moral of the Story*: 130-131

[40]Lucius Ugorji, "The Right of Self-Determination and Participation in Political Government in Africa"*Oche-AmamifeWisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy*(2005)151-152.

[41]EmekaOjukwu, *Because I am Involved*, (Enugu: Spectrum Books, 1989)180-181

[42]Benjamin Kwashi, "Nigerian Cleric BlamesCorruption on Politicians" *This Day Newspaper* (2002), au.africa archive (au.africa.com) Retrieved on 08-10-2006

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

The 1st Republic that lasted between 1960-1965 was characterized by economic exploitation, social injustice and public authoritarianism. Most ethnic based political parties in the First Republic namely the Northern Peoples Congress(NPC), the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), the Action Group (AG), the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) deepened political sector corruption by indulging in massive rigging, and electoral violence.[43] Having veiled themselves in parochialism, selfishness, greed, corruption, sectionalism and tribalism, they disrupted elections, hijacked electoral boxes, stole electoral materials and printed fake voting cards. It was during the first republic, that the word "rigging got into the political vocabulary of Nigeria politics.[44]

Majority of the 1st Republican politicians engaged in wanton embezzlement of public funds. For instance, both Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe and Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh were accused of illegal accumulation of wealth. The Great Zik of Africa was also investigated by Forster-Sutton's Tribunal for siphoning public funds into the African Continental Bank (ACB). The Tribunal indicted Azikwe, revealing how Azikwe's family sustained a financial empire through the use of public funds.[45]

In the defunct Western region, the Cooker Commission Report of 1962 indicted Chief Obafemi Awolowo for economic and financial crimes, for siphoning six and half million pounds of public funds from the National investment and Property Company (NIPC) to the Action Group's Treasury between 1958 and 1960. Thus, electoral fraud, violence, profligacy, total neglect of the Nigerian electorates caused Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu to abruptly sack the First Republican Government on January 15th 1966. Similarly, Major-General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi's regime which lasted for about seven months instituted different Commissions of inquiry into the affairs of governmental parastatals- the Nigeria Railway Corporation, the Electric Corporation of Nigeria, the Nigeria Airways and the Nigeria Ports Authority in his bid to fight corruption. The findings of these commissions confirmed glaring cases of graft among Nigerian political elites.[46]

As political sector corruption deepened with widespread reports of misuse of power, interference in the award of contracts, favouritism, misallocation of funds and inflation of costs, General Yakubu Gowon instituted the Public Officers (investigation of Assets) Decree No.5 of1966 which enforced the forfeiture of corrupt acquired assets. Gowon's anti-corruption strategies were not very effective because it provided safe haven for corrupt politicians and military elites who sucked the nations treasury dry due to opportunities provided by the oil boom era.[47]

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[43]EloAmucheazi, *Government, People and Struggle Against* Corruption in Nigeria", in Elo. Amucheazi, Chibuzo. Ogbuagu& JohnsonOleru, *Moving Nigeria to Greatness* (Owerri: M Cajec Publishers, 1997) 184

[44]Sunday C. Chuta, *Corruption in Nigeria,* (Nsukka-Nigeria: Afro-OrbisLtd, 2004) 22

[45]OkwudibiaNnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980) .46

[46]Billy J. Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982) 42

[47]. Chuta, *Corruption in Nigeria*,.24

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Murtala/Obasanjo's regime instituted panels of inquiry which were backed up with the legal frame work provided by the corrupt practices Decree of 1975. Murtala's regime ensured that serving government officials who committed economic and financial crimes forfeited their loots to the then Federal Military Government. Murtala did his best to inculcate the spirit of probity, accountability and good public conduct into every average Nigerian citizen through exemplary leadership.

Corruption in high and low places pole-vaulted to Olympian heights in the Second Republic under the presidency of Alhaji Shehu Shagari whose election victory at the polls were very controversial. The NPN-led government thrived seriously in corruption. Achebe intimated how the then Federal Minister of Communications, Audu Ogbe stated that "The Federal Government lost N50 million every month as salaries to non-existent workers. Again, Nigeria in the course of one year lost N600 million to racketeers.[48]

It was also during Shagari's regime that the Audit Department of the Abuja Development Authority and the Nigerian External Telecommunication were burnt down in 1983 to cover up the embezzlement of millions of naira in those establishments.[49] The Corruption Index became so high that Chuba Okadigbo summarized its pervasiveness in this way:

> ...The corrupt man is everywhere, the man on the street the man next door, the man in the church or mosque, the man in the market or the department store, the policeman on beat patrol, the soldier at the check point.[50]

The prevalence of ethical decay and indiscipline in the Nigerian social milieu caused Shagari to set up a Code of Conduct Bureau and the Ethical Revolution respectively in 1981. The ethical revolution programme instituted by Shagari failed because he lacked the moral will to check the excesses of members of his kitchen cabinet in the likes of the Dikko's, Uba Ahmed's, the Umaru Shinkafi's and the Maitama Sule's who swum in the ocean of corruption. In short, Shagari never cared whether the moral war on corruption was voted up or down. For instance, Ladipo Ademolekun, affirmed that "The actions of the government over which Alhaji Shagari presided contradicted everything that was ethical and the moral tone of the society was at its lowest level ever".[51]Shagari's ostrich evasion of the realities of financial recklessness, corruption and indiscipline on the Nigerian economy attracted the wrath of the military who struck on 30th December, 1983 with the following reasons outlined by Dauda Abubakar below;

> In some states, workers are being owed salary arrears of eight to twelve months and in others, there are threats of salary cuts, yet our leaders revel in squandermania,

[48]Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria,* 1983, 49
[49]Chuta, *Corruption in Nigeria*, 27
[50]ChubaOkadigbo, *Power and Leadership in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Published 1989) 137
[51]LadipoAdemolekun, *The Fall of the Second Republic* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1985) 10

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> corruption and indiscipline, continue to proliferate public appointments incomplete disregard of our stark economic realities.[52]

Another military junta that carried out a serious crusade against indiscipline and graft was the Buhari/Idiagbon's regime(1983-1985).Buhari blamed Nigeria's underdevelopment on the evils of corruption and indiscipline which took different forms like inflation of contracts, over-invoicing of contracts, fraud, embezzlement, money laundering and smuggling. The Buhari/Idiagbon's regime in spite of her records of human rights abuses pursued a reformist programme through the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) campaign. The W.A.I's main philosophy was to stamp out social ills and inculcate virtue of orderliness, work ethics, nationalism, patriotism, environmental sanitation and wiping out corruption and economic sabotage.[53]

General Ibrahim Babangida's government which took effect from Augusts 27. 1985 following a *coup de tat* felt that the best way to win the war on corruption was through the re-orientation of the value system of Nigerians. He therefore inaugurated an anti-corruption programme called Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Self -Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). MAMSER sought to inculcate the virtues of honesty, prudence in financial matters, probity, accountability and patriotism. It also mounted serious campaigns where Nigerian's were advised to shun vicious acts like ethnic and religious bigotry, electoral fraud, manipulation ofcensus figures and examination malpractice. However, Babangida's regime with its autocratic tendencies and arbitrariness which undermined the rule of law lacked the capacity to mobilize the Nigerian populace through the socio-political programme of MAMSER.[54]

Some political analysts like J. Sanda[55] and Haruna Olakwa[56],argued that Babangida's anti-corruption programme was "a type of contradictory politics". For instance, his inability to implement the Corrupt Practices and Economic Crime Decree which he promulgated shows his luke-warmness on the fight against corruption. Haruna Olakwa argued that Babangida used tenure-elongation pursuit to compromise the moral war against corruption in the following manner;

> "Politicians, academic, economic parasites... the contractors, military officers, traditional rulers, journalists, lawyers and soothsayers/mallams and Babalawos all

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[52]DaudaAbubakar, "The Rise and Fall of the First and Second Republic" in Festus U. Okafor (ed.) *New Stage for Curbing Ethnic Religious Conflicts in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1997) 89

[53]Ujam, H. Ujam, *Contemporary Social Problems and Outline History of Nigeria* (Enugu: Utoo Printing and Publishing Co, 1995) 17

[54]Anthony E. Nkwocha, *History of Nigeria Book Three From Independence to the Contemporary Period*, (Owerri: Standard Nigerian Publishers, 2012) 143

[55]JulieSanda "Understanding the Anti-Corruption Act," *This Day Newspaper* (March 24, 2002)

[56]HarunaOlakwa, "Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics: Formation of Political Organizations and Parties", in Festus U. Okafor (ed.) *New Strategies for causing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1997) 128

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

> benefited immensely from Babangida in his struggle to perpetuate himself in power. Sycophancy, outright dishonesty and government instigated intrigues, became the order of the day.[57]

Chief Ernest Shonekan's-led interim National Government supported the crusade against corruption in public life but could notachieve much due to shortness of its tenure. General Sani Abacha's regime set up a laudable Anti-corruption programme like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) launched on the 4th day of May, 1994. Sani Abacha also promulgated the Indiscipline Corrupt Practices and Economic (Prohibition) Decree of 1994 which wasmeant to eliminate cases of drug trafficking and other economic crimes such as 419.[58]

General Abdulsalami Abubakar's government that succeeded Abacha uncovered and appropriated ill-gotten funds and property stolen by Abacha himself, members of his family as well as those of his cronies. Chuta, gave us details of Abacha's loots in the following manner;

> In Abuja seven choice property... along with high-rise buildingin Victoria Island, Lagos. The cash recovered from him include Us $625, 263,187, 19, 278,306,888,93 and N100,000,000 together with 30percent shares of the West African refinery in Sierra Leone, worth upto $420,000 US dollars. Between Abacha's son, Mohammed and his brother Abdulkabir, the government recovered up to N346 million. Asfor Abacha's security Adviser, Ismaila Gwarzo, the federal government took possession of 13 properties located in Abuja, Kano and Zaria as well as cash worth almost N400 million and $2million.[59]

Thus, Abacha's unbeatable corrupt record in human history coupled with the financial recklessness of other military brigands like Babangida, Abdusalami Abubakar, and Gowon etc. convinces any skeptic that military regimes in spite of their fake corrective posture scan never provide any panacea to the monster called corruption.

The fourth republic which commenced May 29th, 1999 under the presidency of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was characterized by poor International image attributed to wide spread corruption. Nigeria was rated the most corrupt country by the *Transparency International* (TI). This rating was a direct reflection of the poverty of military leadership which legitimized official corruption. Ribadu captured the total degeneration of all sectors of the Nigerian social life in this way:

> ...In the period, Nigeria was a veritable laboratory to test all kinds of selfish concepts and ideas. The nation suffered

[57]HarunaOlakwa,,"Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics", 66.
[58]Chuta, *Corruption in Nigeria*, 33
[59]Chuta, *Corruption in Nigeria*, 33

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> near-permanent losses in all aspects -our moral fabric was shredded beyond recognition, social infrastructure were dilapidated, crime, both violent and non-violent were at their highest level ever. We were a pariah nation in the comity of nations and worse, Nigeria's had lost hope in themselves...[60]

Obasanjo fought the Nigerian corrupt social milieu through two major Anti-corrupt institutions- The EFCC and ICPC. The EFCC whose motto is "no one is above the law" has worked very hard toreduce the rate of corruption in Nigeria.[61]Ribadu, highlights some of the major achievements of E.F.C.C. in the following manner;

> Today, we have recorded 31 convictions bordering on Advance Fee Fraud, (419) money laundering, corruption, banks etc. We have also helped to recover and return victims of other countries, millions of dollars stolen by Nigerians to the point that Nigeria is not a safe haven for stolen funds. Our work has helped to boost the banker capitalization process.[62]

Effect of Political Sector Corruption on National development

Political sector corruption has impacted negatively on the over-all development efforts of the Nigerian nation. Certain multiplier effects of endemic corruption by political office-holders on sustainable development in Nigeria are highlighted below:

- **Weakening effect on governmental institutions:**
  Scholars in the field of Politics, History and public Administration are in agreement that corruption breeds inefficiency and ineffectiveness which weakens governmental institutions thereby making it difficult for the ordinary members to reap the dividends of good governance.[54]Gerald E. Caiden & Naomi J. Caiden think that corruption involves loss of moral authority, weakens efficiency of government operations, increase tax payer's burden undermines political decisions, encourage police brutality, leads to in sufficient use of resources and benefits the unscrupulous at the cost of the law abiding.[63]Corruption is therefore a dysfunctional and anti-developmental phenomenon since it reduces the availability of resources for development, thereby making the development efforts of our country more expensive and slow.
- **Kills Spirit of Accountability, Transparency and Due Process**:
  Political sector corruption and corrupt acts kill the spirit of accountability, transparency and due process, which in turn helps the political class and business elites to engage in massive looting of public funds. These funds

[60]Ribadu, "Corruption: *The Trouble with Nigeria*,"
[61]Ribadu, "Corruption: *The Trouble with Nigeria*,"
[62]Ribadu, "*Corruption: The Trouble with Nigeria*"
[63]Gerald E. Caiden & Naomi J. Caiden, "Administrative Corruption", *Public Administrative Review,* 37 no. 3 (1977) 301-304

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are stashed away as investment in foreign banks. Government officials in different capacities as Governors, Ministers, Executive Advisers and even Commissioners award inflated contracts to friends, relations and benefactors with the sole-intention of reaping certain financial benefits. When a polity has a leadership that is not accountable or transparent such a country must surely manifest underdevelopment traits.

- **Retards the Pace of Economic Development:**
  Corruption in the political sector, retards the pace of economic development since it compromises wastage of surplus capital. Corrupt politicians engage in gross mismanagement of Nigeria's ailing economic resources thereby making it difficult for surplus capital to be properly utilized or invested.

- **Creates Room for Political and Social Instability:**
  Political sector corruption works against the principles of democracy and good governance. Between 1999 till 2007, Nigeria's general elections had been marred by election irregularities. The Nigeria political class are so corrupt that they collaborate with officials of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and their political thugs to rig themselves into power. Many of them import arms for the use of their thugs. After fixing themselves into different political positions with the tacit support of their god-fathers in politics, their political thugs get reabsorbed into the macro-society as armed bandits, hired killers, child abductors, gangsters, rapists. Election malpractice also bring about inter-party skirmishes which if not properly handed can plunge the entire nation into a state of political turmoil.

Corruption in Nigeria: The way forward.
Having x-rayed the impact of political sector corruption on national development, it becomes worthwhile to suggest certain measures that can be taken to reduce the spate of corruption and consequently promote sustainable development.

- **Fighting Political Sector Corruption through Institutionalization of Good Governance based on the rule of law**: The War Against political sector corruption can only be won through the institutionalization of democratic governance that is based on strict adherence to the rule of law. Nigerian governments should adhere strictly to the 'rule of law' in order to promote the virtues of accountability, transparency, predictability and due process. These views were espoused by William Keeling who stated thus:

> ...Government accountability is undermined by inadequate accounting of the proceeds of the state dominated oil sector, the principles of transparency is threatened by murky contracts, corruption comes before predictability and the rule of law is often distorted by government dictat.[64]

[64]William Keeling, "Lagos May prove World Bank's Acid Test" *Financial Times* (1999)

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- **Fighting Political Sector Corruption through Conduct of Free and Fair Elections**: Our titanic battle against political sector corruption can be won if Nigerian government at different levels can painstakingly resolve to conduct free and fair elections. Most elections in Nigeria since the First Republic has been marred by irregularities such as rigging and violence. It is noteworthy to observe that election malpractice assumed its worst dimension since 1999 when the country degenerated to the point of "fixing candidates" into political offices even before the actual conduct of elections. The implication of election malpractice on responsible governance is that it aids the selections of corrupt political office holders who cannot provide exemplary leadership because they are only accountable to their political god-father's that imposed them on the people. When a government in power is founded on election misconduct, such a government must always have legitimacy problems. Most times such a government will lack the moral courage to declare total war on corruption.

- **Fighting Corruption through an Enthronement of Genuine Leadership**: To stem the tide of political sector corruption in Nigeria, we need honest, exemplary and visionary leadership. We need a leader who believes in social justice and can never compromise the letters of the constitution no matter how hard his hands are tied.[65]Ojukwu sums up the qualities of a Nigerian leader who will lead any national crusade against corruption in this manner;

> ...The new leader must not only say but should always demonstrate that the power he exercises is derived from the people. Like every Nigerian public servant, whether in office or out of office, he must be accountable to the people for the use he made of their mandate. He must get out when the people ask him to get out...[66]

Similarly, Ribadu thinks that for Nigeria to achieve zero-tolerance for corruption, she needs genuine leadership. Her leaders must subject themselves to scrutiny if any doubt is raised about their conduct in public office. The present obstacle created by the immunity clause in section 300 of the 1999 constitution must be urgently addressed.[67]

- **Fighting Political Sector Corruption through Strengthening the Constitutional Powers of Anti-Graft Agencies like the EFCC and ICPC**: The anti-corruption agencies set up by ex-president Obasanjo should be given necessary backings to execute their duties and functions without fear or favour. Both judicial and legislative arms of government should ensure that the presidency does not wield undue influence on the Anti-graft agencies. The efficiency and effectiveness of both EFFC and ICPC should be enhanced by making sure that members of its work force whether public servants or security operatives should consists mainly of men and women of proven integrity. To this end, its workers should be carefully screened in

[65]Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, .150
[66]Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, 150
[67]Ribadu, "*Corruption: The Trouble with Nigeria*" 9-10

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order to detect corrupt job seekers who if recruited in the Anti-Graft Agencies will infect morally upright ones with their corrupt nature.

The present writers feel that the only way that Anti-graft Agencies could be freed from the stigma or monster of corruption is by ensuring proper remuneration for its work force who if possible could be recruited from serving public servants and security personnels whose track records in their respective places of work are indicative of such pleasant virtues like honesty, humility, accountability, transparency and diligence.

- **Fighting Political Sector Corruption through an Independent and Impartial Judiciary**: The spate of political sector corruption and abuse of public office can be reduced if Nigerian governments strive hard to over-haul its judicial institution. To this end, the judicial work force whether legal or para-legal should be trained to be independent and impartial. There is the need to pay "living wages" to members of the Bench that is magistrates, judges and other judicial workers so as to help them resist the temptation of graft and also maintain their integrity and impartiality. Different tiers of government whether federal, state should equally provide Judges and Magistrates with adequate security to shield them from the wicked machinations of corrupt men.A corrupt-laden country like Nigeria requires an impartial judiciary whose primary duty will be to fearlessly interprete the laws of the land and as well punish kleptocratic political officeholders who engage in squandermania.

- **Fighting Political Sector Corruption through Upholding the Doctrine of 'Free Press'**:

For the Nigerian states to achieve the objectives of zero-tolerance to corruption, there is the need to uphold the doctrine of 'Free Press' as enshrined in the constitution. The mass media (whether print or electronic) should be given necessary incentives to carry out her constitutional roles in exposing corrupt public servants to the members of the public. They should also use their media outfits to mount serous campaigns against bribe-taking, squandering of public funds, flagrant abuse of office by public servants, political god-fatherism, election malpractice /fraud, nepotism, human trafficking and even religious bigotry. These awareness campaigns always serve as danger signals to the 'corrupt politician'.

- **Fighting Corruption through Setting up an International Economic and Financial Crimes Court**: The United Nations organization should consider Setting up an International Economic and Financial Crimes Court where Advance Fee Fraud syndicates (419) and political office holders who embezzle public funds will be tried. This court will reduce the spate of corruption in many African countries and in turn pave the way for economic development.

Conclusion

This paper has done a critical appraisal of the phenomenon of political sector corruption that has afflicted Nigerian societies since the neo-colonial periods.

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

The battle against political sector corruption can never be won completely so long as serving governments (whether military or civilian) having imbibed the culture of kleptocracy to sustain their bourgeoisie status, lack the moral and administrative will to combat the hydra-headed monster of corruption.

Since political sector corruption encourages poor governance and autocracy, it is not only anti-developmental but also creates serious dysfunctionality in the operations of governmental institutions. It kills the spirit of accountability, transparency and good governance and results in profligacy that leads to wastage of public funds and reduction in the quality of government services. In spite of its endemic nature, Nigeria can still win the moral war against political sector corruption through the institutionalization of a democratic governance based on the rule of law and the conduct of free and fair elections. The Anti-Graft Agencies, EFCC and ICPC should be given necessary constitutional backings to execute their duties and functions without fear or favour.

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