

Corruption, development and political instability in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating the intertwined dynamics of corruption, development and political instability in Nigeria. Drawing on a combination of qualitative research method, it examines how pervasive corruption has hindered the country's socio-economic progress and contributed to political turmoil. By analyzing case studies and conducting interviews with key stakeholders, the paper sheds light on the complex web of relationships between corrupt practices, stalled development and heightened political unrest in Nigeria. The findings suggest that addressing corruption is crucial for promoting sustainable development and mitigating political instability in the country.

Introduction

Nigeria's development is one that has been confronted with a number of corrosive variables. These variables which span across political, economic, religious among others include corruption. It is observed that corruption has drained almost inestimable value of Nigeria's resources, eroded those basic socio-economic and political values and norms on which development rest. This phenomenon is found in democratic and dictatorial policies, feudal capitalist and 'socialist economies. It is in Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist cultures². In the words of Lenz and Lipset corruption has been ubiquitous, in societies from ancient Egypt, Israel, Rome and Greece down to the present.³ It does not respect any continent, region and ethnic groups' though its previous rate differs from the developed regions and the developing ones. It cuts across political systems affects both the young and the old and overtly diminishes the collective welfare in society. The most detestable position today is that this vice has permeated the psyche of the nation's political leaders, bureaucrats and even the ordinary Nigerians. To a great extent, this vice has been contributory to political instability in the country. It now seems more of an aspect of the nation's political culture and social norm than a social vice.

This phenomenon is not only domesticated in Nigeria but also internationalised to the extent that the nation's political class, the bureaucrats and their cronies collude with their foreign allies in masterminding corrupt practices. These

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²Okeke, R. *Bureaucratic Corruption a seminar presented in partial fulfilment for award of Bsc in Public administration, Imo State University Uturu. 2005.*

³Lenz, G.S and Lipset Martins. *Corruption, Culture and Markets in Culture Matters.* Newyork: Basic Books, 2000.



leaders at times give covert protection to their foreign allies as they traffic foreign currencies and perpetrate all manners of corruption in the country. These acts instill crises in the political and economic fabrics of the country.

This paper in other words, is a modest attempt at tracing the root causes of corruption in Nigeria, and its impact on the different fronts of national development using data generated before 2006. However, since the phenomenon still persists till date, the paper makes suggestions on how the country can rise to the challenges it poses to the nation.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, the elite-mass theory is put forward in other to explicate this study of corruption in Nigeria. In his explication of this theory, Mosca Gaetano contends that all societies are divided into two classes of people: a class that rules and the class that is ruled⁴. He stresses that the class that rules, the elite class, is usually less numerous but performs political functions, monopolies power and enjoys the advantages that power brings even to attaining their self centred goals as opposed to the goals as opposed to the goals of the oppressed mass class. The advantage of the elite class of controlling the power of policy making, using it to divert public wealth to meeting their individual needs engenders corruption and impoverishes the mass of the people whose wealth they control. A close examination of the development crises in Nigeria brings out corruption leadership as mastermind by elite as a dominant internal factor. The members of this class ascend to the social ladder mainly through politics which processes of ascendancy are also corrupt and once they attain power, they enact policies that gradually dispossesses the masses of power and control in the societal scheme of things, thereby relegating them the masses to societal passivity.

Conceptualizing Corruption

It is important at this early stage of this study to critically examine the concept of corruption as a foothold on a detailed analysis of how the phenomenon affects the overall socio economic and political development of Nigeria. There is hardly any one definition of corruption that has gained global acceptance. This is mainly because it is a cultural phenomenon which is perceived differently by different people. For example, it has been observed that while some acts are right and cultural in a given society, such acts are frowned at as aculturaling others and therefore unacceptable. Thus, most definitions of corruption are criticised as lacking comprehensiveness. Corruption can generally be described as the abuse of public power for private benefit⁵. It also involves some notion of illegality and is not confined to the public sector⁶. defines corruption as "behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public rule because of

⁴Bobbio, N. "Gaetano Mosca and the Theory of the Ruling Class." In On Mosca and Pareto, 11-31. Genève: LibrairieDroz, 1972.

⁵Tansi V, Corruption around the World; causes consequences, scope and curses. IMF working paper WP/97/139. 1998

⁶ Nye, J. S Corruption and Political Development. A cost benefit analysis. The American Political Review, vol.61, no 2

private interest/regarding (personal, close family, private clique) precautionary or status gain, or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private behavior. In addition, Tansi rather looks at the phenomenon from several points of view and defines it as such behaviours as bribery, nepotism and misappropriation⁷. Osaba adds that corruption is anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms and which undermine the authorities to improve the living conditions of the people⁸. In a study, Bayley argues that corruption, while being tied particularly to the act of bribery, is a general term covering misuse of authority as a result of considerations of personal gain, which need not monetary inducement⁹. He links corruption to what can be called political prostitution, where the civil servant sells his public office to the highest bidder for personal gain. In his study of corruption in Ghana, Werlin sees corruption as the diversion of public resources to non-public purpose¹⁰. Here the office holder directly and illegally appropriates public resources for his own private use or that of his relatives and friends. Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics underscores that corruption obtains when an official transfers a benefit to an individual who may or may not be entitled to the benefit¹¹. According to this book, by taking bribe, the official breaks a legally binding promise he gave to his principal (the state) to allocate the benefit to those entitled to it. It concludes that corruption is neither a property of a social system or an institution, nor a trait of an individual's character but rather an illegal exchange

Types of Corruption

As in the definition of corruption, attempts at classifying the concept have met with similar difficulties as scholars approach to it differs widely. In this paper, the major forms include political corruption, bureaucratic corruption and electoral corruption.

Political Corruption

Political corruption may be defined with reference to the main actors involved, namely persons at the highest levels of the political system, and the purpose of the corrupt behaviour, namely to sustain the hold on power¹². It is usually involves a violation of existing laws and regulations, but it is not restricted to this. It is political corruption also when the national laws and regulations have custom made loopholes and are deliberately side-stepped or ignored. Hence, political corruption can be for private and group enrichment and for power preservation purposes.

Bureaucratic Corruption

⁷Tansi (1998)

⁸Osaba, S. The Nigerian power elite, 1962-65 in Gutkind PCW and P(eds)Reader, London, Heinemann 1997

⁹Bayley, E, 'The effects of corruption in a Developing nation' The western political quarterly, vol.9, No 4, 719- 32. 1966

¹⁰Werlin, H. The roots of corruption. The Ghananian Enquiry, The Journal of Modern African Studies, vol 10. 2, 247-66 .1973

¹¹ Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics, Oxford University Press. 2003

¹² Dike V.E Corruption in Nigeria: A new para. 2005

Bureaucratic corruption occurs in the public administration or the implementation end of politics. It is the kind of corruption the citizens encounter daily at places like schools, local licensing offices, police, taxing offices and on and on.

Electoral Corruption

As it is with other forms of corruption, electoral corruption is multi-faceted. It includes purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favour, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election. Nigeria is a good example where this practice is common. Votes are bought, people are killed or maimed in the name of elections, losers end up as winners in elections and votes turn out in areas where votes were not cast.

Effects of Corruption in Nigeria Political Effects

In the political realm, it undermines democracy and good governance by flouting or, even subverting formal processes. Corruption in elections and in legislative bodies reduces accountability and distorts representations in policymaking, corruption in judiciary compromises the rule of law and corruption in public administration results in the inefficient provision of services. More generally, corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off and public offices are bought and sold. At the same time, corruption undermines the legitimacy of government and such democratic values as trust and tolerance.

Economic Effects

Corruption undermines economic development by generating considerable distortions and inefficiency. In the private sector, corruption increases the cost of business through the price of illicit payments themselves, the management cost of negotiating with officials and the risk of breached agreements or detection. Corruption also generates economic distortions in the public sector by diverting public investment into capital projects where bribes and kickbacks are more plentiful. It also lowers compliance with construction, environmental or other regulations, reduces the quality of government services and infrastructure and increases budgetary pressures on government.

Environmental and Social Effects

Corruption facilitates environmental destruction. This is so given that even legislation designed to protect the environment are scarcely enforced. Public officials who are to enforce these rules get bribed and turn their attention away while those rules are recklessly broken. The fact is that these corrupt countries may formally have legislation to protect the environment, but they are not enforced if officials can be easily bribed.

Corruption in Nigeria

In Nigeria, this social vice was observed to have been present even in the pre-colonial societies that now make a nation. This indeed accounts for the

existence of certain observed institutional checks in those pre-colonial societies. For example, the emergence of an absolute emir was checked by institutional device built into the collective efforts of his officials¹³, as well as the provisions of Sharia law. In the Yoruba kingdom, the Yoruba Alafin had an institutional mechanism designed to check his possible abuse of office and in any event of such gross misconduct or abuse of office the mechanism was there to force him to commit suicide or be banished from the Kingdom¹⁴. This singular act checked the Alafin from corrupt practices and he himself was to ensure that his officials were not corrupt. The Igbo societies did not repose on any individual so much as to repose him the status of kings. Power was rather decentralised with different agencies or institutions being used at different times to execute polices. This was partly for fear of abuse and partly for the people's belief that political wisdom is not absolute in any individual¹⁵.

But the nature of colonial administrations as well as its forceful displacement of the traditional rulers from their erstwhile exercise of absolute control of their economies intensified the degree of corrupt behaviour as a survivalist strategy. Falola notes that in the early years of British rule, there were complaints that emirs in the north and chiefs elsewhere difficult to trust with money; their guards stole money and fled and that the local clerks were unreliable¹⁶. Colonial rule undermined the indigenous revenue base of the emirs and kings, tributes ended, toll gates were closed and gifts reduced as citizens began to use new agencies created by colonial government. To those chiefs and kings who received income from the government, the money was never enough to meet their traditional obligations. In their wisdom, they learnt how to use 'gifts whether legitimate or not to augment their salaries. They also learnt that new colonial laws like those on taxation and the system offered them a lot of opportunities to enrich themselves. However, it is argued that the pattern of official corruption has been the same, only actors have been changing.

Corruption and Nigeria's Political Instability

Corruption has remained a fundamental obstacle to the nation's development as well as a major reason for her political instability. The foregoing reveals that from the early days of political independence, the political class of each region used its authority to harass opponents and to pursue its own selfish political interests. At the Federal level, the Northern People's Congress, led by Northern region Premier Ahmadu Bello and Federal Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was the leading force in a coalition with the NCNC, while the AG was excluded from national power. On the erroneous belief that military rule was to be a solution to the myriad of Nigeria's political problems, that is the problems of inept civilian leadership and the problem of corruption; Nzeogwu and his

¹³ Dare L. A text Book of government for senior secondary schools, Ibadan, Onibonjoje press and books industries limited 1985

¹⁴ Ezenwaji, M (2000) Traditional Administrative system in Nigeria; A study of selected Nigerian Societies, Enugu Institute for Development studies

¹⁵ David J (2005) ; The implication of Bribery and corruption in Nigeria' unpublished B.sc project submitted to the department of government and public administration. Imo state University, Owerri

¹⁶ Falola T Corruption in the Nigerian Public service 1945-1960, in Corruption and the crises of institutional reforms in Africa, 1998

four fellow majors came in January 1966 because of their sense of military duty to the nation. For Nzeogwu, it was time to chase out 'the ten percenters; who has allowed tribalism to thrive at the expense of the overall interest of the Nigerian nation¹⁷.

However, as it were, Nzeogwu and his men failed to cling to power. Given an internal military arrangement, Gen. Aguiyiironi emerged the next head of state of the nation. It is worthy of note that in another military intrigue masterminded by the Northern military elite, Ironsi was killed and his government overthrown. It was surprising that Gowon's military administration which prosecuted the 30th month civil war in Nigeria came to be rated highly corrupt. Indeed, ten of his twelve governors were convicted of corruption, malfeasance in office and abuse of public trust¹⁸. The second republic government of Shagari was toppled by Buhari/Idiagbon as a continuation of the military's fight against corruption. Major Gen. Idiagbon introduced another anti corruption programme called War Against Indiscipline (WAI, unfortunately, Mbaku notes, the programme eventually degenerated into policing against disorderly conduct living extravagantly other trivial behaviours. In the end, the Buhari Idiagbon regime was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida who left the political scene with alleged greater magnitude of corruption than any other of his predecessors. He and his cronies were said to have looted the nation's treasury as never before¹⁹. The Obasanjo government (civilian) irrespective of the numerous anti corruption agencies still left Nigeria the 3rd most corrupt in the world²⁰.

A state of emergency was declared in Plateau state over matters associated with corruption. In Anambra state, it was corruption galore as the then governor tussled it out with his political godfathers with the presidency remaining at ease.

Corruption, Development and Nigeria

Corruption as Mauro posits has a number of adverse consequences that economist, development analyst and policy makers are concerned about²¹. He notes that empirical evidence seem to suggest that corruption lowers economic growth through numerous ways looking at it from another angle, he notes that corruption undermines good government, fundamentally distorts public policy leads to misallocation of resources, harm the private sector and particularly hurts the poor. The fact that corruption distorts economic incentive, discourages entrepreneurship and slows economic growth underpins how it undermines development process.

¹⁷Agbese, D. Corruption in Nigeria, Newswatch march 9, 1992:15

¹⁸Agbese, D. Corruption in Nigeria, Newswatch march 9, 1992:15

¹⁹ChukwudumG., Corruption and Bribery in the Nigerian economy, an Empirical; investigation; Satus press

²⁰Atojoko. S. The rape of Nigeria' in Newswatchvol 15, 2004

²¹ Mauro, P The effects of corruption on growth investment and Government expenditure: A cross country Analysis in Kimberly .A. : Corruption and the Global Economy, Washinton DC. Institute for International Economics.

Hope observes further that corruption increases the cost to African (Nigeria) governments of doing business. Kickbacks and illegal commissions, which have to be paid to public officials²². Nonetheless, the single most devastating effect of patronage for Nigerians however is the fact that the system has tied them to oppressive and unaccountable governments for years. In asking the state to protect them and provide for them, individual needs, the fact of mutual support ties the poor into an inherently hierarchical, unequal and corrupt system. Corruption in the form of patronage has thus undermined any attempt to develop Nigeria socially and economically, whereas to provide the basic necessities and to empower the people to take control of their own lives is the goal of social economic development.

Conclusion

Corruption stands out as one of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria's development. That the country is consistently rated as one of the poorest countries in the world, irrespective of her position as the six highest supplier of oil to the world, and the fact that she possesses numerous other human and natural resources has been attributed to the high level of corruption existing in virtually all aspects of her socio-economic life among others.

This phenomenon hampers Nigerian's development and development planning, distorts the socio-psychological disposition of the nation's political leadership and instigates all manner of crisis and instability in the nation's development fabrics such as the bureaucracy and the political leadership through pervasion of their psychological disposition; thwarts the development priorities of the government, causes incredible loss of public resource, accounts for the specter of abandoned public projects and low standard of living of majority of Nigerians. It has crippled the nation's education industry, the power sector, the telecommunication industry among others. It is one main reason why the public corporations in Nigeria generally failed, and a major reason why the government has been hell-bent privatizing cherished public enterprises. Corruption has left about 70 percent of Nigeria's population in poverty, (hungry, sick, ignorant, psychologically distressed, unemployed, retired and neglected, disabled, voiceless, vulnerable, denied and defenseless.

This paper therefore concludes that corruption denies the Nigeria's leadership the needed political will to frontally confront national development thereby deprives the Nigeria's society the genuine socio economic and political development it has long yearned for. Through such corrupt practices as bribery, award of contracts, offer of public offices and outright threat to life, 'the political opposition leadership are bought' over and silenced by the government which freely goes about engaging in programmes and activities that may not be geared towards the general welfare of the masses.

²² Hope, R. Corruption and Development in Africa, New York, Palgrave