

EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION ON NIGERIA’S POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC OBJECTIVES: THE WAY FORWARD

Erunke, Canice Esidene

Department Of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi-Nigeria

ABSTRACT

One of the greatest development challenges facing developing countries in today’s globalized world is the high incidence of political malfeasance and corruption. Nigeria, like most countries in the sub-Saharan African region has been vigorously confronted with the malaise of corruption. Thus 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, had had a fair share of corrupt practices bedeviling them. This study is a theoretical analysis of the concept and context of political corruption in the light of the penultimate role of the political elites who are variously known to be in control of the nation’s common wealth. 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 structure of social behavioral control like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFC) should be restructured and depoliticized. The paper sums up with conclusions and other vital policy recommendations for effective sustenance and consolidation of democratic objectives in Nigeria in the 21st century and beyond.

Introduction

One of the greatest development challenges of the so called Third world economies comprising the entire sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America, and even developed countries namely, Europe and America is corruption. The effects of corruption on the socio-economic, cultural and political landscape of any society 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. 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. 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. Therefore this study will be subdivided into four sections. The first section is the introductory note. The second is conceptual issues bordering on corruption. The third is the nexus between corruption and sustenance of democratic objectives in Nigeria and then the conclusion and the way forward.

Conceptual Issues

Corruption in its many facets has been viewed in several ways. Just as there are multiple phases of corrupt practices in the society, the concept of corruption varies. Otite (1986) cited in Preye *et al* (2011) viewed corruption as the pervasion of integrity of state affairs through bribery, favor or moral depravity. To him, corruption involves the injection of additional but improper transactions aimed at changing the moral course of events and altering judgments and positions of trust. It consists in the doer's and receiver's use of informal, extra legal or illegal act to facilitate matters. This definition buttresses what has been stressed at the on-

set of this discourse in terms of the wide array of the strands of corruption in Nigeria cutting across the political, economic, bureaucratic, judicial, or otherwise spheres of the Nigerian life.

In view of the perceived relevance of political corruption, we can say that Otite's views on corruption may be inadequate in the explanation of the concept. Hence, the focus of corruption must be aligned carefully towards the political elite class-civilian and military alike. Thus according to Yagboyaju (2005) the concept of what has come to be known as political corruption is:

Any act perpetrated by the political class, civilian or military, or a highly placed public official aimed at changing the moral or lawful course of events, especially when the perpetrator uses such a position of authority for the purpose of personal or group interest (such as acquiring wealth, status or power) at the expense of public interest (2005:72).

Dike (2003) on his part corroborated the point of view of Yagboyaju (2005) when he situated political corruption at the highest level of political authority in Nigeria. Thus to him, corruption occurs when the politicians and other important state decision-makers, whose duties are to formulate and implement policies on behalf of the electorate are themselves corrupt. In this sense corruption could be said to have taken place when public policy formulation and legislation are tailored to benefit political office holders to the abject neglect of the mass of the people.

From the foregoing analysis, one can conveniently identify some of the areas of similarities in relations to the various perceptions of corruption by scholars. First, political corruption can be said to be abnormal as it is an aberration to the norms and ethics that maintain and sustain public institutions and processes. Secondly, political corruption is a negation of the social contract entered into by the rulers and the ruled upon the former's assumption of public office, which in turn is an act of sabotage of public trust by the leadership. And lastly, political corruption expresses itself in the jettisoning of public interest in favor of private regarding, accumulation and exploitation. This scenario has the potential of easily diminishing, truncating as well as stifling the growth, consolidation (Erunke, 2012) and sustenance of democracy and democratization in Nigeria in the 21st century and beyond.

Corruption and Nigeria's Political Objectives: Towards Understanding the Nexus

As earlier stated from the preceding literatures, political 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 Enemu, 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 Enemu (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.

Effects of Political Corruption on Nigeria’s Political Objectives

The existence of political 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 political 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 political corruption does no good to democracy. Consequently, political corruption erodes and corrodes the meaning, mechanisms and the very essence of democracy. Again, political 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 and objectives of democracy in Nigeria.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

The study demonstrates that corruption in Nigeria takes more shapes than one. Of particular importance to this discourse is the political corruption which appears to re-enact and reinforce itself in every aspect of the Nigerian facet owing to its strategic role in the making and unmaking of the Nigerian nation-state. The resultant effect of prevailing political corruption according to the study negates every conditions and adherence of social cohesion, stability and democratic sustenance. It entrenches self-seeking attitudes, private regarding and accumulation. The result of this is that citizens who are now alienated from the public office holders become apathetic and in most cases, disillusioned and aggressive in their behaviors, the effect of which trickles down to the general conditions of moral rots, depravity and at best, insecurity as exemplified in the new mode of insurgency witnessed in Nigeria at the onset of democratic experimentation from the better of 1999 to date.

The poser therefore is: what is the way forward for Nigeria and its people? In an attempt to answer this question, the paper will address the following vital resolutions as panacea for the country.

Firstly, the constitution of the land must be respected and obeyed to the letter. Every rule guiding the behaviors 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. Secondly, 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. The best way to do this is to urgently amend the anti-graft law of the EFCC and hence, divorce the agency from politics and place it under the control of the civil society organizations, trade unions and other political groups.

Again, every known legal obstacles and challenges on the path of the EFCC must be removed. Such hindrances such as the immunity enjoyed by major political office holders in Nigeria have been found to stifle justice system in the country. Unfortunately, this legal instrument enjoyed by political arrow-heads have shielded them from investigations and prosecutions either while in office or outside in most cases. The tendency therefore is that several monies running into billions of naira or dollars have been reportedly siphoned and laundered in foreign banks with reckless abandon. This indeed, is not healthy for the country.

Moreover, the freedom of Information Bill should further be explored and strengthened to the extent that the secret deals of public officials and politicians, including their private businesses and accounts are made public for everyone to see. When this is done, caution in the affairs of public business will be at the heart of every public official. And circumventing these rules will spell stiff punishment for such a person as well as serve as deterring factor to potential partners in crime.

Finally, the affluence associated with politics in Nigeria today where those in power appears to be amassing public wealth has literally transformed politics into a lucrative business. Those going into politics should not be made to be exceedingly rich so that prospective politicians will

think of other trade other than politics. A situation where politicians dominate the circle of oil money, and continue to do so sends a serious wave of awakening to peoples that money making is best carried out in politics.

It is the contention of this study that when all these strategies enumerated above as part of the broader policy objectives to stem the tide of political corruption in Nigeria are dully followed, then, there is the likelihood that realizing Nigeria's political and socio-economic goals, objectives and aspirations will be much more easier than settling down to take bread and butter in a public café.

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