

## **CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRATIC SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA, 2007-2017**

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### **Abstract**

*Corruption, especially political and financial corruption, has fraught and impedes efforts of government towards socio-economic development in Nigeria. The rate, at which public funds are looted, siphoned and mismanaged with impunity calls for serious concern. This study therefore examined the effects of political and governmental corruption on the sustenance of Nigeria's democratic rule between 2007 and 2017. Content analytical method was adopted to ascertain the consequences of corruption on the development of Nigeria's economy through the review of secondary data, such as write-ups from textbooks, journals, and internet materials, periodicals and quarterly magazines. The theory of prebendalism was adopted for the study. Prebendalism espouses the reasons why corruption, be it, political, bureaucratic, economic or financial is on the increase in Nigeria. Findings revealed that greed, quests for power to perpetuate self in governance breeds all forms of corrupt acts in government circles. Recommendations were made that leaders with vision should be elected or appointed; that those in leadership positions should lead with the spirit of patriotism and sense of objectivity so as to move the country to next level of social and economic transformation.*

**Keywords:** Corruption, democratic sustainability, prebendalism, leadership, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

The occasion of Nigeria's independence from British rule on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960 elicited widespread celebrations from Nigerian criticisms. The euphoria that accompanied the country's independence found vivid expression in the independence message of Sir, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first and only Prime Minister to date. Upon receipt of the constitutional instruments by which the British conceded self rule to Nigeria, Balewa had stated that it was wonderful that Nigeria had assumed its rightful position in the comity of nations and expressed the hope that history would vindicate the nationalists' choice of the gradualist path to independence.

Expressing similar ecstasy, in his inaugural address as the first president of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, declared that his stiffest earthly assignment was ended and that his major life's work was done given that his country had gained the much fought for freedom. He then thanked God for sparing his life to witness the independence of his native land (Odey, 2015).

Stressing the importance of freedom and democratic rule, Edwinah (2014) asserts that to ensure sustainable democratic development tied to sustainable peace, there is need for effective leadership that will enthrone democratic principles which will guarantee, transparency, probity and accountability and state transformation. He noted that the election, appointment or choosing of incompetent, ineffective or inept leaders, would enthrone and breed corrupt leaders and corruption in Nigeria's democratic rule. Similarly, Ibeogu (2017) averred that the negation of electing leaders that are patriotic and have the sense of upright judgment today breeds corruption to an alarming scale in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, it has been observed that corruption is a global phenomenon. The most widely cited definition of corruption which was given by World Bank (1997) quoted by Raimi (2013) sees corruption as the abuse of public office for private gains. Implicated in this definition is clearly that corruption is clearly unethical and involves illegal advantages procured through official position. Corruption has so many facets. This was better captured by Akanbi (2005:8) who classified corruption in Nigeria into three categories. These, according to him, are:

- (I) Street level corruption which describes corruption in administration as shown in day today experiences of the citizens in their interactions with officials;
- (II) Business corruption that occurs among low to medium sized business with or without active connivance of the equivalent public sector officials; and
- (III) High level corruption, which involves huge sums of money in high power centres in finance, public service and administration.

It is against this backdrop that this study became imperative to examine the effect of political, public, governmental and executive corruption on the Nigeria's democratic rule.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Corruption** – This is the behavior which deviates from the formal duty of a public role because of private regarding that violates rules against the exercise of certain type of private regarding influence (Ikpeze, 2013). For Dwyne (1993) Corruption is an improbity or decay in the decision making process in which a decision maker consents to deviate or demands deviation from criterion which should rule his or her decision making in exchange for a reward or for the promise or expectation of a reward, while these motives influencing his or her decision making cannot be part of the justification of the decision. Corruption is the abuse or complicity in the abuse of private or public power. This entails that corruption takes place in private and public sectors; it holds individuals and institutions that are involved in the abuse of power, office and authority vicariously responsible.

**Political Corruption** – Peter Eigen, cited by the Transparency International (2002) sees executive or political corruption as the corruption that has to do with the political elites and their cronies continue to take kick backs at every opportunity. Nye (1989) it is the subversion of the public goods by private interest. It is the behavior which

deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding. For Person et al (2003) it involves self dealing by public officials who extract resources through graft and embezzlement. Political elites through corrupt transactions capture private benefits from public offices they hold.

Public Corruption, Ofoeze (2004) Public or governmental corruption refers to any act or behavior deliberately perpetrated by government or public officials in a manner that secures advantages for the governmental functionaries, associates and friends.

High level corruption is what Ogbonnia (2000; 2) called “political corruption, illegal, unethical or unauthorized exploitation of one’s political or official position for personal gain”. Gboyega quoted in Olasupo (2009:188) says; Corruption involves the giving and taking of bribe, or illegal acquisition of wealth using resources of a public office including the exercise of discretion. In this regard, it is those who have business to do with the government who are compelled somehow to provide inducement to public officials to make them do, what they had to do or grant underserved favour. Therefore officials taking advantage of their office to acquire wealth or other personal benefits are termed political, executive or bureaucratic corruption.

This study sees corruption of any sort as the abuse of established standard of public service and governance for private benefits. It may also come in monetary terms or otherwise, which is referred to as economic or financial corruption. Economic and financial crimes or corrupt act is the aspect of corruption that deals with the abuse of laid down procedures for management of public funds. It manifests in looting, money laundering, abuse of financial memoranda, mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds, contract kicks back, among others.

The high executive (political or public), bureaucratic, economic and financial corruption and other democratic ills prompted the military takeover of power on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966.

In a nationwide broadcast, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, the leader of the coup said; the constitution is suspended and the regional government and elected assemblies are hereby dissolved. All political, cultural, tribal, and trade union activities, all demonstrations, unauthorized gathering, religious worships are banned until further notice (Odey, 2015).

The following day, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1966, Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi addressed the nation to confirm the coup and has taken over of government as head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces to forestall break down of law and order and check the growing incidence of corruption that had engulfed the country (Odey, 2015).

Historically and not minding the claims by the military that corruption contributed to the military takeover of 1966, cases abound of corrupt practices and corrupt public officials in Nigeria. In its 2004 report on worldwide corrupt practices, Transparency International Survey covered 146 countries, which rated Nigeria as the third most corrupt country, beating Haiti and Bangladesh to the maintained that corruption reached its peak during the regime of General Sani Abacha who was

acknowledged to have stolen between 4 and 5 billion US dollars between 1994 and 1998, surpassing all records of state loot within a short period of time.

In this current political dispensation and fourth republic, there are cases of executive corruption, political and financial recklessness involving political appointees and chief executives of states (governors). For instances, the former governors of Imo State, Enugu State, Abia State, Jigawa State, Adamawa State, Oyo State and most recently Dizeani Allison Madueke were accused of money laundering and of public fund to the tune of between (N200.000.000.00) two hundred million naira to about four trillion naira (Zero Tolerance 2016, Ibeogu, 2017).

### **Methodology**

The research adopted content analytical techniques. Relevant literature were reviewed from available sources, namely, textbooks, journals, internet materials, quarterly magazines, including 'Zero tolerance' produced by EFCC on the past chief executives of states arraigned for corrupt acts. Others are information gathered from media commentaries on television and radios.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopted Prebendalism theory. Prebendalism refers to political systems where elected officials and government workers feel they have right to a share of government revenues, use them to benefit their supporters, co-religionists and members of their ethnic group. Marx Weber applied the theory to describe India and China in the early Middle Ages in his book titled, *The Religion of India*. However, it was Joseph (1996) who first used the term to describe patron-clientalism or neo-patrimonialism in Nigeria. According to the theory of prebendalism, state offices are regarded as prebend that can be appropriated by office holders who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents or kin groups. And largely as a result of that kind of patron-client or identity politics, Nigeria has regularly been one of the lowest ranked nations for political transparency by the Transparency International in its Corruption Perception Index.

Prebendalism is very much prevalent in the political and social fabric of Nigeria. The extent of prebendalism's stronghold on the Nigeria bureaucracy is such that it hampers the effective practice of democratic government and development.

The relevance of the theory to the study is predicated on the fact that corruption (Executive, Political, Bureaucratic, Economic and Financial) among public officials in Nigeria results from the misleading notion that public office is a means to plunder public resources. Politics is too lucrative in Nigeria and most politicians see public office as their return on investment and a means of helping their kinsmen and women. This harmful practice has made corruption endemic in Nigeria's political and democratic institutions.

Therefore, the idea of Buhari's administration prosecuting many past government officials on cases bordering on political corruption and other forms of corruption is a right step in the right direction and all hands must be on deck to fight the ugly menace so as to enhance democratic development in Nigeria.

### **Empirical Review**

The empirical study by Sherriff (2014), on “politics, governance and corruption” sought to establish the impact of corruption on politics and public governance. The study which adopted survey method and institutional theory as its framework of analysis established that leadership failure breeds political corruption and other forms of corrupt acts. The implication of corrupt acts on politics, public governance and democratic rule are economic and structural underdevelopment; poverty and burden of governance. Recommendations were that anti-corruption war should be intense and backed by new and systematic strategies; that anti-corruption agencies should no longer be under the control of the executive arm of government, but should be independent.

In another study, Odey (2004) sought to establish the impact of corruption on the development of the state. It adopted comparative analytical method and established that what has done the greatest harm to Africa and Nigeria is the social cancer, called corruption. It further pointed out that it has become extremely difficult for any Nigerian to live and survive through honest means without being tainted with corrupt act. Recommendations were that government officials should avoid corruption and corrupt tendencies so as to take Nigeria to the next level; that government officials should lead by personal examples so as to promote moral rectitude among Nigerians.

Eme (2011) examined the role of the EFCC in combating political corruption. Specifically, the study tested the effectiveness of EFCC in promoting democracy devoid of looting public resources. Observation method was adopted and anchored on extractive corruption theory as a framework of analysis. It established that what agitates average Nigerian politician is a threat to jeopardize his or her political aspiration. It recommended anti-corruption laws, legislations and regulations to be written in simple language and made available to the people; that EFCC and other anti corruption or security agencies should be empowered and granted absolute autonomy to handle cases relating to political corruption.

### **Abuse of Public Trust and Mismanagement of Public Fund: The Case of some former Governors**

Every public office holder is bestowed with trust, hence it is required that his office duties are discharged with some level of honesty, probity, accountability and transparency. The former governor of Adamawa State and one time Chief of Naval Staff, Rtd Comdr Murtala Nyako, was reported to have been impeached by the State House of Assembly on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2014 on alleged gross misconduct and financial improprieties (Sunday Sun 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2014). This is in contradiction to the oath of office he swore. He was alleged to have fraudulently mismanaged and diverted about fifteen billion naira (N15b) belonging to the Adamawa State government. True as this allegation may be, what becomes the faith of his subjects, as funds meant to better the plights of the good people of Adamawa State by paying workers salary, providing and improving social infrastructures, such as roads, schools, hospitals and portable water are recklessly misappropriated by the state government? This goes to portray

Bilkisu Yusuf (1985) statement when he said that corruption is one of the most important causes of the country's underdevelopment. Jega (2001), Ngwube and Okereke (2013) as enunciated by Alli (2015) classifies the consequences of corruption into; political, economic, social and environmental. Politically, corruption constitutes a major obstacle, challenge, bridge and set back, not only to democratic governance, civil service development, rule of law, but impairs public governance development. On economic sphere, corruption leads to the depletion of our national wealth which has commensurate consequence to the development of human existence. This is because; it has brought about the use of scarce public resources to finance uneconomic high profile projects that cost billions of naira. For instance, essential projects like building and equipping schools, building and equipping hospitals, construction and maintenance of roads, the supply of electricity and water to rural and urban centres are neglected in place of uneconomic projects and frivolous fun fare by the government. Development of market structures has also been hindered, leading to lose of jobs and investments.

Alo (2017) opines that political leaders should be accountable and ethically bound in positions of authority bestowed on them. That public rules of service (civil service) engenders sound moral ethics, probity and accountability, eschew impartiality, promotes meritocracy, honesty, transparency, and total absence of corruption, but these seems to be at variance and across border lines with the actions of the leaders in Nigeria's public administration and government.

Abah, et al (2017) pointed it clear that corruption has remained a challenge that constraints development in Nigeria, not only in the public sector, private sector, political sector, social sector, cultural sector, religious sector but all aspects of human endeavour. They noted that the litany of corruption cases and allegations of looting by present and some former political and public office holders are mind boggling, de-dignifying, dehumanizing and embarrassing to a nation that parades and prides itself as the giant of Africa. Therefore, if the allegation of siphoning N15b by Rtd Comdr Murtala Nyako was correct, then the impeachment is justified and the accused should have been arrested by law enforcement agencies (anti graft institutions) interrogated, arraigned before the court of law, if found guilty, should be sent to jail as deterrent to other public office holders.

### **The State of Democratic Governance in Nigeria**

When the catholic Pontiff, Pope Francis talked about people who are pushed to the fringes of life and the way they ultimately react to their wretched condition, he talked from experience. He came from the part of the world where millions of people live in abject poverty. So, having come from the area infested with poverty, he understood the effect of poverty on its victims and the citizens (Uguru, 2015).

Nigeria is in a state of turmoil because a greater part of her citizens are left to experience devastating life situations. These sufferings and pains are the consequences of bad governance in most local government states and the country at large. The poor state of life among Nigerians prompted Ejikeme (2012) when he stated that one indicator of corruption is bad governance and leadership style coming

from the leaders. Since corruption enthrones bad governance, bad governance leads to absence of social service delivery, system collapse and a threat to the stability and security of the land. He further pointed that since corruption amounts to bad governance, it entails that public wealth are stolen by the trustees of the public goods (government). When these occur, it encourages mass capital flight from the economy, anti-people policies and programmes, retarded development, frustration, unemployment, poverty, increase in violent crimes, such as prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping and abduction. Kidnapping and abduction lead to loss of investment because local investors, multinational corporations and foreign investors to relocate, thereby bringing underdevelopment of the state economy, hence increase the spate of poverty in the country.

In the education sector, health sector and general administration, the governors of some states in Nigeria have allowed that to collapse. For instance, while the public schools are in a very poor state, the governors (past and present) and their cohorts are busy building private institutions of leaning to the detriment of public owned institutions (Odey, 2004; Ibeogu, 2017).

There is nothing wrong having private educational institutions side by side with the publicly owned institutions, but what makes it worrisome is that these public officers failed to put public schools in good order while in office, and that shortly after they left office, their private educational institutions, sprang up with modern facilities. Such cases abound in Ebonyi, Niger, Adamawa, Plateau and several others in the country. While in office as public functionaries, teachers hardly get their salaries, schools hardly open for academics because salaries are not paid, dearth of manpower, I.C.T facilities etc, but the reverse is the case if it is privately owned (Odey, 2004, Ibeogu, 2017). In the health sectors, the public hospitals lack drugs, hospital bills are very expensive, general hospitals owned by state governments are abandoned, Imo state is a litmus example with abandoned uncompleted general hospitals in all the local government areas of the state. In Ebonyi State, the government under Chief Martin Elechi leased out the State University Teaching Hospital (EBSUTH) to the federal government on the grounds that the state government had no money to pay the health workers their consolidated salary structure, but the same administration funded private and missionary hospitals in the state to the tune of about two hundred million naira (N200m) yearly while the governor and other top government functionaries accessed quality healthcare abroad (Ibeogu, 2015).

Furthermore, presently in Ebonyi State, despite promises of enhanced salary promised workers during the 2015 gubernatorial election campaign, the civil and public servants in Ebonyi State hardly get their salary as and when due, where it is paid, the payment is in percentages not full salary. Worse still is the denial of the state work force their fringe benefits (leave allowances), promotions are denied, where it is conducted, no financial effect, pensioners are denied their pensions, not only in Ebonyi State but in almost all states of the federation (Ibeogu, 2017). These has led to the death of many government workers (for example Mr. Paul Okey) of Iduma Primary School, Ishielu L.G.A who died on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2015) while some civil

servants have resorted to stealing, to make ends meet (Oginyi, 2015, Nwigwe, 2015).

The afore-mentioned factors necessitated the position of Odey (2004) when he stated that corruption has been institutionalized in Nigeria and that the poverty level in Nigeria due to corruption prompted UNDP (1997:32) to state that poverty is a state of being in which an individual is incapable of utilizing resources around him to improve himself economically, socially, politically or otherwise. These, it attributed to lack of opportunity for education, which is essential to human development. Alozie *et al* (2008) maintained that corruption has greatly affected the development of education in Nigeria, and that the most worrisome aspect of it (corruption) is that the zeal to work hard to pass exams among students is dampened. He maintained that the decay in the Nigerian educational system is such that it will be difficult to provide enhanced educational development that will bring about virile and stable education for Nigerians come 2020-2030.

In a related issue on the impoverishing of the people and the workforce due to corruption by the leaders, Uwakwe (2010) insisted that there is a correlation between corruption and poverty; that what instigates poverty in Nigeria is the high scale corruption cases among the political actors (Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary) in the political domain. He held that the individual and the society at large are exposed to several societal goals which will impact meaning into their lives, but it is unfortunate that not all the individuals have access to these opportunities. Those unfortunate and less privileged individuals deprived and impoverished of good life and abundant opportunity, craft and devise illegitimate means (Corruption) to achieve their goals and set targets in life. Okereke (2004) corroborated the views of Uwakwe (2010) when he aligned himself that the most significant factor that aids and abets corruption in Nigerian society is poverty. He maintained that lower class public servants are poor, and so cannot avoid extortion and gratification from their schedule of duty. According to him, since they live below the poverty line and feed from hand to mouth; they are faced with so many economic and social responsibilities; such that they need to take care of their families, pay their medical bills, but that their statutory income (salary) are not enough, worst still, not paid as at when due, so susceptible to corruption.

Segun *et al* (2012) espoused that there cannot be democratic governance that will encourage patriotism, dignity of labour, virile society and meaningful development etc in Nigeria when leaders (chairmen, governors, legislators, president) who are not visionary, effective, selfless, dynamic and people oriented emerge to take over power and governance. He enunciated a situation whereby leaders who lacks the above principles and are corrupt emerge leaders in Nigeria's political democratic system as annoying and embarrassing.

### **The Effects of Corrupt Acts on Public Assets Development and Democracy in Nigeria**

The consequences of this cankerworm, "corruption" that distorts Nigeria's political economic growth are viewed from different dimensions by authors in this study. Akpanabia *et al* (2014) stated that Nigeria and its economy suffer a great deal



as a result of corruption which is perceived as global scourge. The hope of Nigeria turning a great country politically and economically is dampened when leadership and good governance is impaired by corrupt practices of our leaders and the led. The individuals, society and the economy will suffer retrogression development because leaders with vision, and transformational ideas, proactive, responsive, accountable, and leading by personal example are lacking. This is much so because when these leadership ideals are lacking in the leaders, they go hell wire by canonizing criminals who are eulogized and given juicy traditional titles and all forms of political appointments to help them perpetuate selves in government and drain state economy to their own benefits and cronies. This exactly happens in south east states, with Ebonyi State topping the list, though it also happens in other states of the federation, but seems worst in south east states (Ibeogu, 2017), Segun (2012) toed the steps of Akpanabia (2014) when he stated, that this accounts to why Nigeria economy has been in a lamentable state, such that there are dearth of infrastructures and deterioration in the living standard of the people. He equally accounted on how Rasheed Ladoja, former governors of Oyo State (2003 – 2006) and Alao Akala (2007-2011) carted away N51m and N14, 190.000.000, to buy two (2) SUV Cars and 33 toyota hiace buses respectively at the detriment of state fund. Ogbeidi (2012) opined that corrupt acts impedes socio-economic development, frustrates quest for sustainable growth, especially as foreign aids, foreign investments, taxation and entrepreneurship are distorted, while politically, it affects the way a country is ruled. Arvind (2001) maintained that corruption affects income distribution, and that ineffective income redistribution results to resource misallocations; hence poverty and hunger all over the land. While Akomaye (2007) states emphatically that a nation where corruption and corrupt acts is institutionalized, the tendency is breakdown of law and order, and for Ikpeze (2013) corruption brings about a threat to the existence of peace and security of lives and property, while Ibeogu (2015) concluded that where peace is lacking, the possibility to sleep relaxed will be lost.

### **Conclusion**

This study concluded that to ensure a healthy democracy that will guarantee good governance, the elected leaders should lead by personal example and also keep to campaign promises. Again, leadership should not be seen as a means of amassing wealth at a collective expense but an opportunity to promote the economic well-being of the citizenry.

### **Recommendations**

- I. Those in leadership positions should lead with the spirit of patriotism and sense of objectivity so as to move the country to the next level of social and economic transformation;
- II. Leaders with vision should be elected or appointed;
- III. Leaders across levels of government in Nigeria should lead by personal example;

- IV. Elected representatives should ensure effective representation, to avoid societal uprising;
- V. Government should avoid spending public funds on frivolities.

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