

Corruption: Barrier between Democracy and Development

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Abstract

Corruption remains a pervasive challenge with significant implications for both democracy and development in many countries, particularly in the case of Nigeria. This paper explores the intricate relationship between corruption, democracy, and development, highlighting how corruption acts as a barrier to the effective functioning of democratic institutions and hinders sustainable development initiatives. Drawing on a comprehensive review of literature and empirical evidence, the paper examines the various forms and manifestations of corruption, its detrimental impact on democratic governance, and its adverse effects on socioeconomic development outcomes. Through critical analysis, the paper underscores the urgent need for concerted efforts to address corruption as a fundamental step towards fostering genuine democracy and achieving sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Corruption, barrier, democratic governance, sustainable development, Nigeria

Introduction

Corruption has been a persistent issue throughout human history, spanning generations and civilizations (Okenna, 2020). It stands as one of the most formidable obstacles on the path to democracy and development in contemporary societies. Its insidious presence undermines the pillars of governance, erodes public trust, and hampers socioeconomic progress. It has caused political and economic instability in societies; and depending on the scale, it has led to social conflict and violence, as competing groups vie to control state power, which is used for the distribution of public resources (Odonuga, 2000). It exists in both developing and developed countries but is pervasive in the latter.

In the context of emerging democracies like Nigeria, ever since independence, corruption poses a particularly daunting challenge, impeding the realization of democratic ideals and stifling efforts towards sustainable development. The unavailability of the appropriate litigation support services in the court leads to misjudgment, poor corporate governance, weakness in traditional auditing, and a battered image of the Nigerian nation in the international. Flagrant and barefaced corruption has persisted ever since independence and combating this problem has been encumbered by mass unemployment, high insecurity rate, an exponential increase in wealth disparity, to mention but a few, all occasioned by an ineffective government and political system (Bamidele, 2016). For Osoba (1996), corruption has long been ingrained in the fabric of Nigerian society. Ogundiya (2012) summarizes this institutionalized culture by equating holding public office in Nigeria with enjoying certain privileges. In a different article, he stated that over time, corruption in Nigeria has transitioned from mere practice to an accepted norm, even becoming psychologically ingrained and deemed necessary Ogundiya (2009). Lawal and Oladunjoye (2010) highlight the widespread perception that corruption in Nigeria surpasses that of other nations, attributing it to a prevalent culture of theft and corruption. Nigeria grapples with what Lawal and Oladunjoye term “amoral familism,” where bribery and corruption are commonplace, and the country has normalized the use of personal connections and intermediaries in bureaucratic dealings and political influence peddling. According to Onyeoziri (2004), corruption in Nigeria is not just a deviation but a deeply ingrained cultural phenomenon. Once individuals assume political office, societal expectations compel them to prioritize personal gain over societal development, perpetuating a cycle of corruption. This pervasive corruption transcends tribal and cultural boundaries, affecting all segments of Nigerian society.

The concept of corruption has garnered widespread public outcry and significant attention from researchers across various fields in recent times. Its endemic nature renders it pervasive, posing a threat to the fundamental fabric of society (Adeboye, 2008). Corruption is widely believed to be responsible

for the shortcomings and poor performance of the Nigerian political economy, as the country's abundant natural resources have failed to translate into economic growth. Examining the nexus between political corruption and national economic downturn, Adam (2001) highlights how the misuse of official power for personal or group interests contributes to economic deterioration. It asserts that political corruption impedes economic progress and ultimately results in economic decline. He underscores the ineffectiveness of past efforts to combat political corruption in Nigeria, attributing it to the insincerity of leaders and overseeing agencies. It proposes a reorientation of Nigeria's values, prioritizing ethical employment practices, democratic principles, and robust political institutions. In the economic sector, corrupt practices, notably financial crimes, have lingered, poisoning and undermining developmental efforts in Nigeria (Adegbite, 2012). In Adenike's analysis, corruption per worker yields a negative influence on output per worker, foreign private investment, expenditure on education, and capital expenditure per worker (Adenike, 2013). Agalanmanyi (2002) opines that the failure to tackle corruption in important public institutions such as the Nigerian Custom Service (NCS), Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), Nigerian Police Force (NPF), and Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs (FMIA), among others, which have an impact on the economy, has been a major factor inhibiting economic growth and development.

With the limited impact of government-led reforms aimed at establishing an efficient public procurement system, scholars have delineated strategies for fostering enduring anti-corruption capabilities. These strategies encompass political dedication, media involvement, and safeguarding whistleblowers. Achua (2011) advocates for the necessity of a participatory and inclusive approach in formulating and executing an anti-corruption action plan. Scholars like Aflobai (2007), acknowledges the role of established international agencies in the fight against corruption and states that the bulk of the work lies with the nationally coordinated anti-corruption agencies due to the limited reach of international agencies. Since some scholars identify colonialism as the root cause, Agbibo (2013) argues that to properly grasp the dynamics of corruption and impunity in postcolonial Nigeria, one must start with its experience of colonialism which created a culture of unbridled corruption and fettered democracy.

As the title suggests, this paper delves into the intricate relationship between corruption, democracy (governance), and development, with a specific focus on Nigeria. This paper focuses on the impact of corruption on the quality of governance and its impact on development processes. It looks at the role of institutions, leadership, accountability mechanisms, and citizen participation in promoting transparency and reducing corruption. Within this framework, the research analyzes how weaknesses in governance institutions undermine democratic principles and hinder development progress. The aim is to explore how corruption acts as a barrier that hinders the transition to robust democratic governance and obstructs the pathways to meaningful development initiatives. By examining the multifaceted dimensions of corruption within the Nigerian context, this paper seeks to shed light on the complex interplay between political malfeasance, institutional integrity, and socioeconomic advancement. This introductory section provides an overview of significant literatures on the pervasive challenge of corruption in Nigeria. We will then delineate the scope of the paper, outlining the key themes and analytical frameworks that will guide our exploration of corruption's detrimental impact on the democratic and developmental aspirations of nations like Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis of scholarly literature, empirical case studies, and theoretical perspectives, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced dynamics at play in the struggle against corruption. By elucidating the ways in which corruption undermines democratic governance and impedes efforts to achieve sustainable development goals, this study endeavors to offer insights that can inform more effective policy interventions and governance reforms. Ultimately, this paper seeks to underscore the urgent imperative of addressing corruption as a fundamental barrier to the consolidation of democracy and the attainment of sustainable development outcomes. By grappling with this pervasive challenge head-on and proposing strategies for its mitigation, we can aspire to build more resilient and equitable societies that uphold the values of integrity, justice, and collective progress.

Contextual Clarification

In contemporary political discourse, democracy has gained widespread popularity, but its definition and interpretation remain highly contested. Nations worldwide recognize the crucial role of governance in societal development, emphasizing the importance of democratic principles such as popular participation, competitive choice, civil liberties, and leadership accountability. Over the years, numerous definitions of democracy have emerged, each adding layers to the ongoing discourse. Dahl (1982) characterizes democracy as a system of elected representative government governed by the rule of law, where key population groups participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in governmental decision-making, particularly in resource allocation. According to Majekodunmi (2012), democracy serves as a fundamental tool driving political proficiency, economic development, and social stability within a nation-state. Ukase (2010) defines democracy as a political system marked by regular, free, and fair elections, allowing politicians organized into political parties to compete for power based on the voting rights of all adults and the assurance of various political and civil liberties. Lawal and Olukayode (2012) emphasize the participatory nature of democracy, highlighting its role in enabling citizens to choose and select credible representatives through periodic elections, providing avenues for self-satisfaction and fulfillment. However, Nigeria's claim to democratic governance falls short of meeting these scholarly definitions. Instead, Nigerian political leaders often prioritize self-interest over genuine citizen participation, leveraging any means necessary to secure political positions and exploit public resources, to the detriment of the voiceless populace.

Some scholars may associate democracy with the Western model of development; however, this paper diverges from such a notion. Chan (2009) conducted a study on democracy and development in Japan and some Asian newly industrialized countries, exploring whether developing nations need to adopt democracy or the Western model to achieve economic success. The study contends that while economic and social freedoms are crucial, Western-style institutions or culture are not necessary. It argues that liberal democracy is not a prerequisite for development; instead, what matters for development are social and economic rights, irrespective of the type of regime. Viewing democracy etymologically, the paper interprets it as “the ruling of the people,” signifying a government of, by, and for the people. Therefore, echoing Chan's perspective, any country that meets the social and economic needs of its populace can be considered democratic.

Despite assertions by scholars like Ajayi and Ojo (2014) that democracy is an abstract and elusive form of government due to challenging fulfillment assumptions, it is undeniable that democracy, or good governance, has brought significant benefits to humanity, particularly to nations that practice it. For instance, China, often regarded as a socialist state, exemplifies democratic principles. In this context, democracy is synonymous with good governance, which is deemed essential for development. Good governance, in essence, refers to a government that upholds the social contract with its citizens, emphasizing transparency and accountability. It entails an administration that is attentive and responsive to the people's needs, adept at addressing emerging societal challenges through appropriate laws and measures. Moreover, it necessitates strict adherence to principles of accountability (Fatile, 2012, p. 49).

The term “governance” presents a challenging concept to define, often serving as a contested area within political science discourse. In its simplest essence, governance encompasses the existence of multiple agencies that transcend traditional boundaries between the public and private sectors, collectively playing crucial roles in the development and implementation of public policies (Rhodes, 1996, p. 652). Within this framework, governance can be understood as the act of governing a nation or overseeing a company or organization. In the context of this paper, “governance” is delineated within the context of the three tiers of government—federal, state, and local—as the efficient, effective, and accountable exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority aimed at achieving a society's objectives, encompassing the welfare of the entire populace, sustainable development, and personal freedom.

Development is a complex and contested concept that has sparked debates among scholars across various disciplines, particularly in political, economic, and social spheres. Todaro (1989) presents development as a multifaceted process involving significant changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, alongside accelerated economic growth, reduced inequality, and the

eradication of absolute poverty. Sen (1990) further elaborates on development, emphasizing capacity expansion that necessitates adequate empowerment of both the economy and society to fulfill their respective responsibilities. This entails bolstering state capacity, ensuring institutional and governmental stability, and fostering societal empowerment. Rodney (2009) encapsulates development as the ability of a society to harness its natural resources to meet the material and social needs of its people. This entails a continuous process of tangible positive change in individuals' or societies' quality of life, marked by reductions in poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Ultimately, despite its nuanced interpretations, development revolves around enhancing society and improving citizens' well-being.

Corruption poses a significant barrier to development, prompting increased efforts by institutions like the World Bank to promote good governance and combat corruption. The World Bank (2006) defines corruption as the misuse of public power for private gain, a definition widely embraced by scholars for its comprehensive coverage of various corrupt practices. Osaba (1996, p. 371) offers another perspective, describing corruption as antisocial behavior that violates legal and moral norms, undermining authorities' ability to safeguard citizens' welfare. Corruption impedes economic growth and poverty reduction by limiting opportunities, fostering inefficiencies, and creating additional obstacles to service delivery (Leautier, Petkoski, & Jarvis, 2006). It undermines effective governance, hampers individual performance, diminishes the impact of development assistance, and stifles private sector efficiency (Kaufmann, 2009; Amao & Amaeshi, 2008). Furthermore, corruption undermines democratic processes and renders democratic efforts futile, posing a significant threat to democratic institutionalization (Vaughan, 1995; Nye, 1967).

Meanwhile, scholars like Mike (2002) argue that defining corruption is a challenging task due to its persistent nature and ability to evolve into new forms (Eme, 2010). They perceive corruption as a multifaceted phenomenon with diverse causes and consequences, adapting to various contexts (Ibrahim, 2003). Despite this complexity, efforts have been made to categorize different corrupt practices. Babatope identifies eight forms of corruption, including fraud, illegal political bargains, embezzlement, bribery, favoritism, extortion, abuse of discretion, and conflict of interest (Babatope, 2008). Ochulor, Iheanacho, and Okpokamfor (2011) focus on five main forms: bribery, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, and favoritism, while Asaolu (2013) identifies seven basic forms prevalent in Nigeria, such as commissions for illicit services, unwarranted payments for public services, gratuities, string-pulling, levies and tolls, sidelining, and misappropriation. Although these lists broadly agree on the types of practices constituting corruption, nuances exist, as some practices are context-specific and require examination within their social context. Thus, while distinguishing between various forms of corruption is essential, it does not entirely circumvent the challenge of societal interpretations of the concept.

Why is Corruption Difficult to Tackle in Nigeria?

Addressing corruption in Nigeria presents a formidable challenge deeply entrenched within the fabric of society, spanning various sectors and levels of governance. Despite concerted efforts to combat this pervasive issue, corruption continues to persist, manifesting in numerous forms and impeding the country's progress. This section aims to explore the underlying reasons why corruption remains so entrenched in Nigeria, delving into the historical, socio-cultural, and political factors that contribute to its resilience. By understanding the complexities surrounding corruption in Nigeria, we can better grasp the obstacles to effective anti-corruption measures and pave the way for meaningful reforms.

From a historical perspective, corruption in Nigeria has ancient roots, evident even in its pre-colonial societies. While traditional African societies had their systems of governance and checks and balances, instances of corruption still existed (Afigbo, 1985, p. 72). Leaders sometimes abused their powers for personal gain, exploiting resources and subjugating their subjects. However, corruption during this period was often contained within smaller scales due to the localized nature of governance structures. The arrival of European colonial powers in Nigeria marked a significant turning point in the nation's history and the evolution of corruption (Falola, 2001). Colonial powers, particularly the British, exploited Nigeria's resources for their economic gain, laying the groundwork for systemic corruption. The imposition of colonial rule disrupted existing governance structures and introduced new forms of corruption, such as bribery, nepotism, and favoritism, to maintain control over the indigenous

population. With Nigeria gaining independence in 1960, hopes were high for a new era of transparency and accountability (Coleman, 1958). However, the post-independence period saw the entrenchment of corruption in various aspects of Nigerian society. Weak governance structures, coupled with political instability, provided fertile ground for corrupt practices to flourish. Successive governments failed to address corruption effectively, leading to its normalization and acceptance as part of the political culture. The normalization of corruption in Nigeria can be attributed to a combination of historical legacies and contemporary factors. Colonial exploitation instilled a culture of impunity and exploitation, perpetuating corrupt practices even after independence. Additionally, post-independence governance failures, characterized by weak institutions and leadership, further entrenched corruption in Nigerian society. Over time, corruption became deeply embedded in the fabric of Nigerian politics, economy, and social life, hindering development and perpetuating inequality (Nnoli, 1980).

From a socio-cultural perspective, dysfunctional cultural norms prevalent in many African societies contribute significantly to the proliferation of corruption. In numerous African states, familial or ethnic obligations often take precedence over the responsibilities of public office, leading civil servants to disregard established rules prohibiting corruption (Gould and Mukendi, 1989; Guest, 2003). Eddie Madunagu articulates this sentiment, stating that in African culture, individuals bear obligations to their community, with higher-ranking officials facing heightened pressure to provide financial assistance, secure employment opportunities, and facilitate the provision of amenities within their areas (Madunagu, 1982, p. 1). The normalization of corruption in Nigeria can be attributed to this cultural context, wherein government officials or politicians who fail to exploit opportunities for corrupt enrichment risk social ostracization upon leaving office. Consequently, the widespread corruption among the ruling elite has imparted a dangerous lesson to the broader Nigerian populace: that honesty and adherence to the law yield little benefit (Osoba, 1996, p. 384). Consequently, some ordinary citizens, influenced by this mindset, seek to emulate the corrupt practices of their leaders at lower levels, engaging in petty acts of bribery, embezzlement, and misappropriation of public funds. Thus, corruption has become ingrained as a way of life, permeating all levels of Nigerian society.

From a political perspective, the point here aligns with the argument put forth by Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz. Like many African states, the Nigerian state lacks clear differentiation from society, leading to the exposure of its inherently patrimonial and particularistic nature of power (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p. 2). Consequently, Nigerian regimes exhibit a distinctively neo patrimonial character. Neopatrimonialism is typified by the presence of patron-client networks operating beneath a superficial facade of statehood characterized by legal-rational principles (Rotberg, 2002). Within this system, the distinction between public and private resources is intentionally blurred, allowing political elites to wield discretionary control over state assets for personal gain, utilizing public office as a means of private enrichment (Lewis, 1994). The concept of neopatrimonialism resonates with many scholars of Nigerian and African politics, as it often results in what I have elsewhere termed the 'political economy of state robbery', wherein individuals unabashedly embezzle public funds (Agbibo, 2010). Agbese contends that in contemporary Nigeria, political factions employ any available means to seize governmental power, leveraging its redistributive authority for self-enrichment (Agbase, 1992, p. 220). Upon assuming control, the new regime erects barriers to entry, effectively quashing any legitimate competition for governance (Mbaku, 2007, p. 437). In extreme cases, incumbents enact laws criminalizing opposition as treasonable offenses punishable by death, aiming to suppress challenges to their monopolization of political and resource control. Consequently, the state fails to fulfill its social contract of safeguarding citizens and their property while providing essential public services, becoming instead a tool for the private accumulation endeavors of the predatory elite. Corruption profoundly undermines democratic institutions, impedes economic progress, fosters governmental instability, subverts electoral integrity, distorts the rule of law, and engenders bureaucratic entanglements (Osaghe, 1998).

The Politicization and Manifestation of Corruption in Nigeria

In the intricate landscape of Nigerian politics, corruption has not only become rampant but also deeply entrenched within the fabric of governance. The intertwining of corruption with political processes has led to its politicization, exacerbating its manifestations and perpetuating a vicious cycle of malfeasance.

In a nation where corrupt practices prevail, the expense of governance skyrockets, stalling development and plunging the populace into dire living conditions. The pervasive corruption witnessed in Nigeria over the past three decades can be traced to the avaricious and self-serving tendencies of political elites Aijede (2001, p. 14). This phenomenon results in structural disparities within the economy and significant squandering of public resources. This section delves into the nexus between politics and corruption in Nigeria, exploring how corrupt practices have permeated various levels of government and political institutions. From embezzlement and bribery to nepotism and electoral fraud, corruption manifests in diverse forms, undermining democratic principles and eroding public trust. By dissecting the politicization of corruption, we aim to unravel the complexities underlying Nigeria's struggle against this pervasive scourge, offering insights into its detrimental effects on democratic governance and socio-economic development.

The self-serving agendas of many public officials in Nigeria foster corrupt practices in their conduct. Funds borrowed by the government from international financial institutions often end up diverted into the private accounts of these corrupt officials. The absence of adequate infrastructure and human development further exacerbates the impoverishment of the populace. Corruption not only deprives today's children of vital resources needed for their future survival and improved living standards but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty. In developed societies such as the USA, France, and Britain, where corruption is vigorously combated due to its detrimental effects on the populace, high governance costs may result from robust social welfare programs aimed at enhancing living standards. However, the same cannot be said for African nations, particularly Nigeria. Aziz (2002, p. 2) asserts that corruption continues to deprive the poor, marginalized, and least educated members of society of the social, economic, and political benefits that should rightfully be theirs—benefits that are often taken for granted in societies that have successfully tackled corruption. In developing nations like Nigeria, government policies often seem tailored to serve the interests of a privileged few—the elites—rather than the general population. Despite facing significant economic, social, and political challenges since the 1980s, policymakers have yet to prioritize the formulation of sound policies free from self-interest (Gberevbie & Iyoha, 2007, p. 411).

The extent of fund embezzlement in Nigeria is staggering. Resources that could have been allocated to the establishment of industries, creating employment opportunities for the masses, are instead stashed away in foreign bank accounts. Masari, as referenced in Gberevbie (2004, p. 229), expressed deep concern upon discovering that Nigerians have amassed over US\$170 billion in foreign banks through illicit means, while the nation continues to suffer from a dire need for investable funds. This amount, he contends, represents approximately five times Nigeria's foreign debt and is largely attributed to public sector corruption. If Nigerian leaders could embezzle such vast sums without repercussions a decade ago, the current level of embezzlement is unimaginable.

At the grassroots level, corrupt practices pervade local government administrations across the country. Many individuals view their appointment or election into public office as an opportunity for personal enrichment through illicit means. Consequently, the acquisition of illegal wealth by public officials leads to an increase in the cost of governance. Budgets at all levels of government—federal, state, or local—are often inflated to accommodate the personal interests of corrupt officials. In a study conducted by Ojofeitimi (2000, p. 62) to assess the performance of a former local government chairman in Lagos State, a respondent highlighted the chairman's rapid accumulation of wealth during his tenure: "the chairman had neither a vehicle nor a house when he assumed office. Less than two years in office, he has three vehicles and two houses. I do not believe that the salary he earned during the period was sufficient to cover the acquisition of these items. I leave you to draw your conclusion."

Corruption in Nigeria is manifested in the following ways:

First, grand corruption. Grand corruption refers to corrupt practices that involve high-ranking officials and significant amounts of public funds or resources. In Nigeria, grand corruption has been rampant at the highest levels of government, and at different sectors of the country, where politicians, government officials, leaders of organizations exploit their positions for personal gain. This form of corruption often involves embezzlement, kickbacks, and the misappropriation of public funds meant for developmental

projects. Also, in the political sector, corrupt practices such as vote-buying and election rigging undermine the integrity of electoral processes and erode public trust in democratic institutions (Oyediran, 2018). For example, during the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, several high-profile corruption scandals emerged, including the infamous “fuel subsidy scam” where billions of dollars were siphoned off through inflated subsidy payments to fuel importers (Okeke, 2016). The “arms deal scandal” involving high-ranking government officials and military officers exposed the extent of corruption within the defense sector, undermining national security and public trust (Vanguard, 2020, p. 4).

Second, petty bribery. Petty bribery is another prevalent form of corruption in Nigeria, occurring in everyday transactions between citizens and public officials at different sectors. It involves the exchange of small sums of money or favors to expedite services or secure favorable outcomes. Petty bribery is rampant in every sector of the Nigerian society. In the business sector, corrupt practices such as bribery, extortion, and embezzlement hinder economic growth and deter foreign investment (Ayogu & Miettinen, 2019). In law enforcement, police corruption undermines efforts to maintain law and order, where police officers often demand bribes from motorists to overlook traffic violations or release detainees without proper cause, leading to a culture of impunity and injustice (Ogundiya, 2012). Finally, in civil society, corruption weakens advocacy and accountability efforts, stifling the voices of marginalized groups and hindering social progress (Adeyemi & Uddin, 2017).

Third, institutionalized graft. Institutionalized graft refers to the systemic corruption within public and private institutions, where corrupt practices are normalized and entrenched within organizational cultures. In Nigeria, institutionalized graft is widespread, with corruption permeating various sectors such as education, where students bribe teachers or examiners for favorable grades or exam scores (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). Corruption has been blamed for the failing standard of education in Nigeria (Nzeakor, 2002) It is believed that qualitative education is a major instrument that transforms society. In other words, without quality education, a society is bound to be retrogressive. However, the goal of tertiary education is to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training, development of proper values for the survival of individuals and society, and development of the intellectual capacity individuals so that they understand and appreciate their local and external environment and acquire both the physical and intellectual skills that will enable them to be self-reliant and useful members of society has been daunted by corruption. Examinations at all levels of the educational system have been faced with diverse levels of fraud and irregularities perpetuated by students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Corruption through admission is nothing to write home about, as this has become a norm in the education sector of Nigeria (Jimoh & Omoregie, 2012). Poor teaching methods, poor remuneration, ineffective supervision, and overemphasis on paper qualification, the dishonesty of the officials of examining bodies and the active connivance of teachers and school authorities are some of the factors that are aiding exam malpractice (Odo, 2002). Consequently, academic corruption has caused the phenomenon of unemployable graduates who are unable to meet the cumbersome curricular structure and demands of the academic system (Adebisi et. al., 2012). This has resulted to the increase of unemployment rate, thereby obstructing the development of Nigeria.

The detrimental effects of corruption on social services, such as healthcare, are widely acknowledged. In Nigeria today, patients often must pay bribes to medical personnel to receive adequate treatment or access essential services, leading to a breakdown in trust and compromised healthcare delivery (Transparency International, 2020). The direct correlation between individual health outcomes and the prevalence of corruption, is manifested in citing issues like drug theft, equipment misappropriation, bribery, nepotism, counterfeit drugs, and fraudulent invoicing of supplies, which are pervasive in both rural and urban areas of Nigeria (Adebola, 2007). Despite the reputation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for advocating against corruption, many Nigerian NGOs are suspected of engaging in corrupt practices and mismanagement of donor funds. Their focus often shifts from ensuring the proper use of donor resources to examining how individuals benefiting from corruption deploy these resources socially (Smith, 2012).

Corruption in Nigeria manifests in various forms and permeates all levels of society, from the highest echelons of government to everyday interactions between citizens. Grand corruption, petty bribery, and institutionalized graft are prevalent across different sectors, undermining democratic governance, economic development, and social cohesion. Addressing corruption requires comprehensive reforms, including strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing transparency and accountability measures, and promoting ethical leadership and civic engagement.

Impact of Corruption on Democratic Governance and Implications for Development

Corruption poses a significant threat to democratic governance by undermining core principles such as accountability, transparency, and the rule of law. This section evaluates how corruption undermines democratic governance and examines its detrimental effects on public trust, electoral processes, and political patronage.

Corruption undermines democratic governance by eroding accountability mechanisms and distorting the rule of law. In democratic systems, accountability is essential for holding public officials accountable for their actions and ensuring transparency in decision-making processes (Klitgaard, 1988, p. 15). However, corrupt practices such as embezzlement, bribery, and nepotism weaken accountability mechanisms, allowing officials to act with impunity and evade accountability for their actions (Johnston, 2005, p. 45). Similarly, corruption undermines transparency by fostering a culture of secrecy and opacity in government institutions. Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index indicates that Nigeria continues to struggle with high levels of corruption, ranking 149th out of 180 countries surveyed (Transparency International, 2021, p. 10). Transparency is crucial for promoting public trust and confidence in democratic institutions, as it allows citizens to hold their leaders accountable and participate in decision-making processes (Heidenheimer et al., 1989, p. 30). However, corrupt practices such as kickbacks and backroom deals undermine transparency by concealing information and distorting public perceptions of government actions. The “Ekitigate scandal” exposed electoral malpractice during the 2014 gubernatorial elections in Ekiti State, where politicians were caught on tape discussing how to rig the election (Obadan, 2017, p. 88). These cases highlight the corrosive effect of corruption on democratic governance and the need for robust anti-corruption measures to safeguard democratic institutions.

Furthermore, corruption distorts the rule of law by undermining the impartiality and integrity of legal institutions. The rule of law is essential for ensuring that all individuals are treated equally under the law and that legal processes are fair and transparent (Heywood, 2012, p. 72). However, corrupt practices such as judicial bribery and political interference weaken the rule of law by compromising the independence of the judiciary and undermining the credibility of legal institutions (Treisman, 2007, p. 88). Also, corruption perpetuates cycles of political patronage and impunity by rewarding loyalty over merit and integrity. Political patronage is a common feature of corrupt systems, where politicians use public resources to reward supporters and maintain power (Seligson, 2002, p. 78). However, patronage systems undermine democratic governance by prioritizing personal interests over the public good and perpetuating a culture of impunity among political elites (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 102).

The effects of corruption on public trust and electoral processes cannot be underestimated. Corrupt practices distort electoral processes by compromising the integrity of elections and perpetuating cycles of political patronage. In Nigeria, electoral malpractice such as voter intimidation, ballot stuffing, and falsification of results undermine the fairness and credibility of elections (Adebayo, 2016, p. 45). Politicians use their financial resources to manipulate the electoral process and secure victory through fraudulent means, perpetuating a cycle of corruption and political patronage. As a result, political elites maintain their grip on power and use state resources for personal enrichment, further entrenching corruption in the political system (Ikechukwu, 2019, p. 165). Among the citizens, it erodes public trust in democratic institutions by fostering a culture of cynicism and disillusionment. For instance, the “Dasukigate scandal” revealed widespread corruption in the Nigerian military and government, with billions of dollars allegedly embezzled from funds earmarked for the fight against Boko Haram insurgency (Arogundade, 2018, p. 30). This scandal eroded public trust in the government's ability to address security challenges and hold corrupt officials accountable. Public trust is essential for

maintaining the legitimacy of democratic governance and ensuring the effective functioning of democratic institutions (Rothstein, 2009, p. 112). However, corrupt practices such as vote-buying and electoral fraud undermine public trust by distorting electoral processes and disenfranchising voters (Rose-Ackerman, 1999, p. 55). It also breeds cynicism and apathy among citizens, leading to low voter turnout and decreased political participation, further weakening the democratic fabric of society (Awal & Musah, 2020, p. 213).

Corruption has far-reaching implications for development outcomes in Nigeria, significantly impacting economic growth, poverty alleviation, and social equity.

Corruption impedes economic growth by distorting market mechanisms, deterring foreign investment, and undermining business confidence (Ugweje, 2016, p. 52). When public officials demand bribes or engage in embezzlement, they create barriers to entry for businesses, increase transaction costs, and reduce overall productivity. Moreover, corrupt practices erode the efficiency of public institutions and weaken the rule of law, creating an environment of uncertainty and instability that hampers economic development (Transparency International, 2021, p. 15).

Furthermore, corruption has also contributed significantly to mass poverty in Nigeria. It has rendered several millions of Nigerians jobless and uneducated. There is no doubt that corruption has been attributed to mass poverty which has been breeding all forms of extremisms in the country, most especially the Niger-Delta crisis and the recent Boko Haram insurgency which as matter of fact came to existence because of the conspiracy that went wrong between corrupt government officials who initially established the movement to their advantage. Poverty in Nigeria is often tied to corruption because resources earmarked for social development and job creation programmes are frequently diverted into private bank accounts. Therefore, corruption has turned politics into a lucrative business venture in the society because anything spent to secure a political office is regarded as an investment that matures immediately when one assumes office (Johnson, 2004). Thus, the costs of corruption are severe on the poor, who are most reliant on the provision of public services and are least capable of paying the extra costs associated with bribery, fraud, and the misappropriation of economic privileges (Paulo, 2002). Also, as Gbenga (2007) asserted, corruption has deepened poverty and made it difficult for ordinary people to get ahead as the result of their own efforts. There is increasing evidence that the social and economic cost of corruption disproportionately affects the poor, who not only suffer from the lack of services and efficient government, but who are also powerless to resist the demands of corrupt officials. Hence, the poor masses end up becoming pawns on the chessboards of corrupt officials. Also, many of the educated youths are either “brain drained” to other lands in search of greener pastures or get diverted into various criminal ways of eking out a living like armed robbery, prostitution, drug peddling and trafficking and all manner of racketeering (Osoba, 1996, p. 384). In this and other ways, rapacious Nigerian elites have compromised the future of their country and its benighted citizens, and reduced Nigeria to a Lilliput (Adebajo, 2008).

Corruption exacerbates inequalities and social disparities by diverting public resources away from marginalized communities and perpetuating systems of patronage and privilege (Uzochukwu, 2018, p. 82). When public officials prioritize personal gain over public service, they undermine efforts to promote social equity and inclusive development. Moreover, corrupt practices erode public trust in government institutions, leading to increased social unrest and political instability (Transparency International, 2021, p. 20). Corruption diverts public resources away from essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, hindering human development and exacerbating social inequalities (Omotola, 2019, p. 125). When public funds are misappropriated or embezzled through corrupt practices, governments are unable to invest in critical infrastructure projects and social welfare programs that promote human development and improve living standards. Consequently, marginalized communities are disproportionately affected, further widening the gap between the rich and the poor (Vanguard, 2020, p. 8).

The Way Forward

Over the years, successive Nigerian governments have made concerted efforts to combat corruption, with notable initiatives spearheaded by former President Olusegun Obasanjo. Despite the establishment of anti-graft bodies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), corruption remains pervasive due to the absence of robust institutions and systems (Nwabuzor, 2005). The influence of patronage and godfatherism undermines the independence and effectiveness of these agencies, perpetuating a cycle of corruption. Although Nigeria boasts comprehensive anti-corruption legislation and has ratified international conventions, enforcement remains a challenge due to systemic corruption within the socio-political landscape. Addressing this issue requires holistic solutions that go beyond mere legal frameworks to tackle the root causes of corruption in Nigeria.

The first key point revolves around the crucial need for strong and purposeful leadership in Nigeria's fight against corruption. Achebe, in his seminal work, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, aptly captures this sentiment by attributing the country's woes to a failure of leadership, exacerbated by institutionalized corruption. The argument posits that the emergence of transparent and decisive leadership would catalyze significant progress in combating corruption. With such leadership in place, anti-corruption bodies would be empowered to operate freely and effectively, leading to a cultural reorientation towards ethical governance. The effectiveness of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) during President Obasanjo's tenure underscores the potential impact of strong leadership on anti-corruption efforts.

The second key point emphasizes the critical importance of reviewing and strengthening existing reforms and policies to address the root causes of corruption comprehensively. This entails motivating and empowering agencies tasked with monitoring corrupt practices to enforce due process and the rule of law rigorously. There is a need for the incorporation of some of the elements contained in the theory of public choice into future anti-corruption programs to be designed and implemented in the country. Some of the elements referred to include introduction of more germane rules, reform of existing laws and institutions, effective and relevant incentive structures and sanctions to deter potential offenders (Agbiboa, 2012). Furthermore, a multifaceted approach encompassing Private Anti-Corruption Initiatives, Public anti-corruption initiatives, and public education campaigns is essential. Such measures would not only deter potential wrongdoers but also gradually mitigate the adverse effects of corruption on the economy. Additionally, punitive measures must be implemented to ensure transparency, monitoring, and accountability within a fair and just legal framework. Establishing robust legal monitoring systems and enhancing social and internal control mechanisms further reinforce the anti-corruption agenda, preventing malfeasance in public sector budgets and promoting accountability across society.

Ultimately, addressing the deeply ingrained issue of corruption in Nigeria necessitates a comprehensive cultural reorientation. Despite widespread pessimism regarding the feasibility of reducing or eradicating corruption, it is imperative to recognize that with concerted efforts, this formidable challenge can indeed be overcome. Corruption has become deeply entrenched within Nigerian society, supported by entrenched social structures and attitudes. However, the establishment of institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) exemplifies a proactive approach to combatting corruption. While the effectiveness of these anti-corruption bodies has been hampered in recent years, primarily due to political factors and a lack of political will among Nigerian leaders, it is crucial to acknowledge their initial successes. The significant achievements of the EFCC in its formative years should instill hope among the populace that corruption is not insurmountable in Nigeria. Thus, there remains ample room for optimism that with sustained efforts and unwavering commitment, corruption can be effectively addressed and curtailed in the country.

Conclusion

While Nigeria grapples with a myriad of complex challenges, the pervasive and profound nature of corruption stands out as a significant impediment to progress and development. While acknowledging that no society is entirely immune to corruption, the extent of corruption in Nigeria has reached alarming levels that threaten any prospects of meaningful development. Tolerating the current situation would only perpetuate this cycle of corruption and hinder Nigeria's advancement. In his oft-quoted work, *An Image of Africa*, Chinua Achebe argues that Africans are corrupt not because they are "different fundamentally from any other people in the world, but because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable. They will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and inconvenient" (Achebe, 1983, p. 58). Therefore, combating corruption effectively requires a paradigm shift that prioritizes principles such as the rule of law, justice, equity, honesty, virtue, and integrity. Addressing corruption at its roots and implementing existing legal mechanisms diligently are essential steps towards this end. Sustainable efforts encompassing multifaceted approaches are needed to eradicate corruption and foster good governance for the benefit of the Nigerian populace.

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