



## CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRATIC STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Since the return to democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, democracy has remained grossly unstable. The political atmosphere has been characterized by so many factors such as violent ethno-religious crisis, sponsored killings and political assassinations, inter and intra-party crisis or squabbles and civil disobedience. At the centre of democratic instability in Nigeria is endemic bureaucratic and political corruption. This study indicates that political corruption has grave implication for democratic stability in Nigeria. It is concluded that democratic stability will be hard to attain as long as corruption remains a way of life and probability unchecked.*

**KEYWORDS:** Corruption, Democratic Stability, Political Corruption, Crisis, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's democratic process has been under severe threats since 1999 when the country returned to democratic governance especially as a result of high rate of corruption. In different way however, corruption is a major setback to democratic stability in Nigeria. The political climate, to say the least is not friendly to democracy. There is the fear generally whether the current democratic experiment will not last. This is because all the factors that led to the collapse of the first and second republics are currently in play. That is widespread political violence, electoral manipulations, political assassination, ethno-religious conflicts, poverty, political apathy, disregard for the rule of law, human rights abuse and pandemic corruption remains the key features of Nigerian political life or system. All these as mentioned above and which are manifestations of democratic instability has direct link majorly to political corruption. Corruption is one of the most dangerous social ills in any society (Anger and Tsuwa, 2011:201). This is because corruption, like a deadly virus, attacks greatly the basis of the authority of the state, not only that but also challenge the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of governance. Ogundiya (2010:233) says that problem of democratic instability persists because the political system has failed to engender, maintain and sustain the belief in Nigerians that democracy is the most appropriate system for the society. This study is set out to determine the relationship between corruption and democratic stability in Nigeria.



## **Clarification of Concepts**

### **Concept of Corruption**

Corruption is not an easily definable concept. This is because most discussions on corruption generate emotions rather than shading light on the subject matter. Another reason that makes it difficult to understand corruption is the difficulty gathering accurate and adequate data on the subject. This difficulty emanates from the fact that, despite the much talked about presence of corruption; documented facts and incidences of corruption are hardly obtainable (Anger and Tsuwa, 2011:202).

Apart from the aforementioned reasons as to what constitute corruption, there is also as Osaghae (1995) and Johnson (1991) argues that the theoretical thinking perceiving corruption as a major factor that possess serious threat to democratic stability, sustainability and consolidation is not uncommon in the literatures. These theoretical stance is depicted in various works and analyses as “amoral politics”, “amoral familism” (Osaghae, 1995; Ogundiya, 2009), “prebendalism” (Joseph, 1987), “patrimonialism, and neo-patrimonialism”, “clientelism” (Seteolu, 2005) to mention but a few corruption ridden states are also described by scholars as “predatory”, “soft” and “lose state”.

The above prescriptions about cases of corruption in Nigeria are suitable to analyze Nigeria situation.

Despite the difficulty in explaining what corruption is, Sorkaa (1999) says, corruption exists when an individual illegally or illicitly puts personal interest above those of the people and the ideas he or she pledges to serve. Corruption in its popular sense is defined as the exploitation of public position, resources and power for private gain (Nye, 1967). Dobel (1978) defined corruption as “the betrayal of public trust for individual or group gain. In a similar way, Obayelu (2007) identifies corruption as “effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expenses, or misuse of public power for private benefit”.

Berns and Tsuwa (2011) quoting Brooks defines corruption as “the intentional misperformance or neglect of a recognized duty, or unwarranted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining some advantage more or less directly personal”. Senturia (1931) sees it as the misuse of public power for private gains. In the same manner, Alatas (1990) defines corruption as the abuse of trust for the sake of private benefits. In a more elaborate sense, to Gire (2001), corruption is defined as a betrayal of trust resulting directly or indirectly from the subordination of public goals over those of the individual.

Corruption manifest in so many dimensions and ranges from simple to complex ones, just as is the case with Nigeria. for instance, there is no area of the Nigerian state that is not enmeshed by corruption.

In the Anti-corruption Act (2000), the government of Nigeria describes corruption as “literally unethical to development and progress”. Origh (1983) in Berns and Tsuwa (2011) put it as the pervasion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity. Ogundiya (2010:233) reveals that corruption is neither system specific nor culture bound. It is ubiquitous”. Therefore, corruption as a phenomenon, is a global problem, and exists in varying degree in different countries (Agbu, 2003) corruption is not only found in



democratic and dictatorial politics, but also in feudal, capitalist and socialist economies. Christians, Muslims, Hindu, and Buddhist cultures are equally bedeviled by corruption (Dike, 2005 cf Obayelu, 2007). Corruption exist in all human endeavors and is as old as human race itself. However, the nature, form, dimension, character and the severity of corruption differs from one nation to another (Ogundiya, 2010:233). But it is noteworthy to say that, it is too alarming in the developing nations due to wake state institutions as compare to developed nations.

### **Concept of Democratic Stability**

Research on democratic stability in the developing democracies is problematic or challenging due to a lot of reasons. “Political traditions are fragile and most at times electoral formulas are changed for primordial motive, and in addition, one cannot always separate personal influence of exceptional political leaders from their institutionally capabilities” (Pugaciauskas, 1999). Another analytical problem stems from the fact that democratic stability could be confused with regime stability (Ogundiya, 2010:234).

The term democratic stability is preferred to “regime stability” as the former carries considerably normative charge. Pugaciauskas (1999) presents some criteria of democratic instability as “cancellation of constitutionally required democratic elections; usurpation of governmental powers usually through fraudulent elections; unconstitutional impeachment etc.”.

Now, what does democratic stability mean? The concept of democratic stability is synonymous with legitimacy, especially if the legitimacy is conceived as the belief in the moral rights of a regime to govern. Therefore, the ingredients of these moral rights that a regime enjoys are inherent in the concept of democratic stability. Osaghae (1995) holds a view that “the premise of democratic stability is that what sustains government and ensures stability is voluntary support or consent of the citizens rather than reliance on coercion. In the words of Diamond (1999) “it is by now a central tenet of empirical theory that stable democracy also requires a belief in the legitimacy of democracy”. Democratic ingredients of stability have been well captured by Diamond et al. (1987 in Osaghae, 1995) thus:

“All governments rest on some kind of mixture of coercion and consent, but democracies are unique in the degree to which their stability depends on the consent of a majority of those governed. Almost as a given, theories of democracy stress that democratic stability requires a widespread belief among both elites and masses that democracy is the best form of government for their society, and hence that the democratic regime is morally entitled to rule.”

Misher and Rose (2001) presents a similar view that “a defining feature of democratic regime is that they depends for their survival and effective functioning on the public’s willing acquiesce and support. Democratic stability, therefore, presupposes “that people have at any given time, the government which they choose and that, being rational beings, they are most likely to support a government which represents and pursues their interests” (Osaghae, 1995). Ogundiya (2010:234) reinforced the view of Osaghae that “a government which represents and pursue peoples’ interest must be responsible and accountable to the people.



Responsiveness and accountability enhance people's affection and support for the system. This further enhances the growth and development of democratic culture, which is a sinequa non for democratic culture, is a sinequa non for democratic stability. Umar (2002) in an illustrative phrase that stable democracy depends on average citizens accepting it as "the only game in town" is actually clear and educative.

Almond and Verba (1963) and Lipset (1994) for example, demonstrated that cultural variables, especially legitimacy can be critical for survival of democratic regimes once they are established. Lipset (1994) stated that "political stability in democratic systems cannot rely on force. The alternative to force is legitimacy". Seligson (2000) also, found an inextricable connection between levels of support and tolerance that; "in situations of low support and low tolerance, democracy is clearly at risk and democratic breakdown seems to be the most likely ultimate outcome".

The belief in the rightness of the political arrangement or what Lipset (1959) called legitimacy is a function of the cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations of the citizens. This is also influenced by the nature of politics, quality of governance, leadership performance, and the character and nature of the relationship among the contending elites. It must be said that the higher the level of democratic legitimacy the more likely, according to Fails (2008), to complete the process of democratization". This process has been described by Diamond (1999) as "democratic deepening", reflecting the continuous ability of democratic institutions to improve political participation; to become more open vigorous and enhance accountability. The central assumption here is that how average citizens perceive democracy has an important impact on its stability. On this note, however, this paper shows that political, bureaucratic, economic, judicial and moral corruption as experienced in the years past has made rubbish of and threatens nascent Nigeria's democracy.

### **The Historical Overview of Causes of Corruption in Nigerian Democratic System**

The genesis of corruption is as old as the human society, because ancient civilization has history of widespread illegality and corruption. Thus, Lipset and Lenz (2000) note "corruption has been ubiquitous in complex societies from ancient Egypt, Israel, Rome, and Greece down to the present" corruption is also believed to be endemic in modern governments and it is not peculiar to any continent, region, or ethnic group.

The traditional Nigeria society was more communal in nature. The family foundation was well established and with sound authority. The elders had absolute powers and influence, and they were respected as representatives of ancestors. The advent of colonial rule, however changed this old order and thereby affected this foundation negatively.

Colonial enterprise in Africa and Nigeria in particular was not for the interest of the colonized. The colonial masters established states in Africa as apparatus of violent repulsion. The consequent of this, were arbitral power used in order to control the colonial enclaves to exploit them. This trade system established by the colonial master eroded the cultural values, and fraternal practice of the colonized and kept them disorganized. Tax system was introduced and with tax collectors who were at the same very brutal and highly exploitative in the course of carrying out their duty. Colonial economy was introduced with disarticulated features in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular.



The exploitative nature of the colonial state created the Nigerian state that took over at the independence, therefore, instead of changing the status quo, the post independent leaders decided to inherit the character of the colonial state by suppressing the yearnings and aspirations of the people thus alienating it from the people (Anger and Tsuwa, 2011:210). It is on these bases that people began to think of other means for survival outside government formations. Many colonized turned to their family and ethnic enclaves and some to even illegal ways for survival thereby creating a fertile ground for the growth and foundation of corruption in Nigeria. The case in point is that post-colonial state breed corruption base on her character and nature.

For instance, as Anger and Tsuwa (2011:210) says that “politics in Africa is a reflection of the nature and character of the colonial state. It is never a peaceful competition because it gives access to the appropriation and privatization of state power mainly for personal aggrandizement. The common dominators in respect to Nigerian politics are politics of personal or selfish rule, exclusion, longevity in office and hostility to pluralism. Accountability, fairness and responsiveness are generally lacking and the end result is leaving the majority of the populace impoverished and the only option therefore for people is to develop strategies to survive at all costs.

The influence of family setting also contribute to corruption crises in Nigeria, that is polygamous nature and the extended family system, and pressure to meet family demands or obligations, which are visible more in less developed countries, are some of the causes of corruption. Here, Merton in Anger and Tsuwa (2011) appreciates a connection between culture and corruption. In the same vein, Banfield in Anger and Tsuwa (2011) shows a relationship between corruption and strong family orientation.

Other causes of corruption are; lack of effective control, weak taxing system, lack or weak institutions of government, poor reward system, poor economic which breed poverty and lastly, the lukewarm attitude of the officers charged with enforcing the law (i.e. judges, police and other public officials) lead to corrupt behaviours.

It could be said that through the aforementioned corrupt means, many political office holders and so many individuals alike have acquired wealth and properties in and outside Nigeria; and they often make shows of the ill-gotten wealth without regret.

### **Corruption and Democratic Instability in Nigeria**

It is evident that since 1999, Nigeria democratic project has been under severe threat. Consequently, democratic practice in Nigeria has remained grossly unstable and the future, seems to be very bleak because of rampant cases of corruption. Ogundiya (2010) reveals that corruption has reached a high crescendo such that an average Nigerian now possibly associates democracy with corruption. Democracy in this regard is view as an open-door to corrupt act, because of some ventilations its provides or the advantages associated with democratic system.

Ogundiya (2010) further listed the consequences of corruption generally on the democratic instability as: cyclical crisis of legitimacy, fragile party structure, institutional decay, chronic economic problem, electoral malpractice or manipulation, poverty, underdevelopment and above all, general democratic volatility.





The argument here is that the above factors listed can breed democratic instability. Then, what are the consequences of corruption on democratic stability in Nigeria. Let us briefly examine this nexus.

### **Consequences of Corruption on Democratic Stability**

Nigeria presents a typical case of failed democracy in Africa due largely to corruption (Maduagwu, 1996) In Nigeria, political power guarantees unlimited and uncontrolled access to the resources of the state and society that are then appropriated for personal and parochial use and advantages.

Nigerian brand of civil politicking is therefore no more than a prebendal enterprise engaged in largely for the crude appropriation of national resources (Joseph, 1987; Fawole, 2005; Ibeanu, 2007).

The effects of corruption on a nation's economy are damaging. Indeed, a nation in undated with corruption cannot be viable economically neither can the system generate enough support or affection required for the survival of democratic system. This is the situation in Nigeria where corruption has become part and parcel of the political culture. Corruption has indeed robbed Nigerians the benefit of economic development because scarce available resources that should have been deployed to execute developmental projects have gone into private local and foreign accounts. For instance, in 2006, the head of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Mal. Nuhu Ribadu estimated that Nigeria lost some US \$380 billion to corruption between independence in 1960 and the end of military rule in 1999 (BBC, 2007).

It is pertinent to note there that, corruption usually leads to diversion of public resources into private accounts. The repercussion of this is that, it changes completely the values of hard work, dedication and faithfulness to a behaviour of total greed, cutting of corners and using all kinds of illegal means to build financial empires Sorkaa (1999).

Obviously, the rate of kickbacks, inflation of contract sums, over invoicing, recruitment of unqualified personnel, waste cost of governance etc. are high due to corruption and are facilitated by government officials. These of course deny the state to delivered on the mandates to which she was formed e.g. provision of basic necessities of life like water, electricity, security, motorable roads, good healthcare facilities among others.

The burden of both local and foreign loans are high on African states generally and Nigeria in particular. Nigeria is one of the African nations that stand at the top of debt issues. The nation's debt is projected over 30billion US Dollars as at 1999 and it continuous to escalate over the year due to the continuous increase in the interest rates that accrue on the monies borrowed. In Nigeria, loans are obtained and instead of investing, they are used for other things else. The situation is further exacerbated by the facts that majority of the loans received are siphoned into the private banks of those in charge.

Indeed, Nigerian corruption case is so alarming and fit into what Amuwo (2005) described as the "folklore of corruption". Expectedly, this has had a debilitating impact on the nation's socioeconomic and political development. The simple fact is that the levels of economic development and democratic stability are mutually intervening. This is because a stable democracy is a function of sustainable economy.



On the political arena, it is not different and it cannot be without corruption. Politically, the effect of corruption is difficult to analyze (Barns and Tsuwa, 2011:212). Corruption has turned politics to a source of livelihood therefore making politics to become the dirtiest game ever played in Nigeria (Angers and Tsuwa, 2011). Politics in Nigeria has become a do or die affair, and a factor of winner takes all. This is because; the holder of political power automatically is the holder of finances of the state and has the liberty to amass wealth without causation. This has resulted to election rigging, bribing of electoral umpire, police and military personnel, buying of voters and in a long run instigate political violence in a case where other means mentioned above failed. The trends have not change but, it is on the increase in a very proportional scale.

Other case of corruption is the one that is ravaging institution of democracy which is the legislature (both at the state and federal levels). Indeed, as Ogban-Iyam (1996) did a hypothetical statement about the National Assembly that:

- (i) When the few control the governance of a polity and have preponderance of force to continue to maintain such control, the National Assembly that emerges from the dictation of such a group is likely to be more corrupt and subversive of democracy and democratization than the one that emerges from the dictates of the popular forces;
- (ii) A National Assembly which is recruited and constituted through corrupt and anti-democratic means tends to be corrupt;
- (iii) A corruptly recruited National Assembly tends to subvert democracy, and hinders democratization'
- (iv) A citizenry that is essentially corrupt tends to have and tolerate a corrupt National Assembly.

The history of legislative activities from 1999 to date in Nigeria has provided a viable truism about the above statement. For example, we should not be quick to forget about Salisu Buhari the Speaker of House of Representatives of fake certificate, Chief Evans Emureng, Chuba Okadigbo and Adolphos Nwabara, case of impeachment on the account of corruption, budget padding by members of National Assembly as reported by Hon. Jibrin from Kano of recent and many more.

On the bases of party politics, corruption is so endemic too. Political party(ies) are central to democratic stability. It is one of the indispensable institutions of democracy. It is observed in several respect that parties constitute a serious threat to democratic system since the country re-democratize in 1999. There were commodity of views in the bulk of literatures on Nigerian government and politics that the demise of first and second republic is largely due to the activities of political parties.

The emphasis here is that, the nature of party system, party formation, composition (ethnic and religious), conflictual inter and intra party relationships, funding and selections or appointment of party candidates are all faulty and problem to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The activities or influence of godfatherism has adversely affected democracy.

The judicial arm of government is not left out in the corruption scandal in Nigeria. judiciary, as it is said is the last hope of common man but research has shown that revise is the case. Since the returned of Nigeria to democratic governance 1999, the activities of the judicial



arm of government called for urgent concern because, the nation has witnessed several cases of corruption with this esteem body. Cases or ruling are for the highest bidders, there were a lot of corrupt interpretations of constitution to serve a particular interest by the judicial officers; forceful removal of senior judges (e.g. the case of Justice Salami and Walter Onogeh) of recent calls for worried and broad day interference into the function of judiciary by the executive arm of government in several occasions are threat to democracy.

Bribery and corruption create the culture of the late payment, delays and refusal to pay for already services delivered in Nigeria, as was reported in Sen (1999) and as Hall (in Renters June 27, 2002) noted on the world on scandal, corruption, leads to “information distortion” as it “cooks the books” and a high level of corruption can make public policies ineffective. The case is not different with Nigeria as a nation. Corruption leads to situated government policies and programmes even its execution. So many are laying waste due to this syndrome of corruption.

Corruption has also been the cause of high rate of insecurity in Nigeria, many people sees the few individual living in affluence from the public monies thereby leaving majorities in absolute hunger and poverty as a result; the only option at hand is violence to make everybody uncomfortable. This is at play in Nigeria every day. For instance, the high level of crimes ranging from assassinations to car snatching, bank and other robberies, rituals and kidnapping are readily evident and of course threat to democratic experiment in Nigeria.

Suffice it to say here that, corruption is so much legalized systematic linked into Nigeria fabric that, people that are well known to be corrupt occupy and control the instrumentality of government and are well celebrated. Just as Sorkaa, (1999) posits that:

“People who also spend their ill-gotten wealth sometimes in building churches and mosques are given special prayers for their generosity. Music makers also sing their praise and they end-up being given chieftaincy titles when they spend a part of such ill-gotten wealth in their communities of origin”.

In all however, corruption in the end erodes people’s confidence and legitimacy of government. This accounts for the lack of patriotism by majority of the populace and political apathy.

## CONCLUSION

Democracy cannot be predicated on a fragile and unstable socio-political and economic base. Corruption, the paper reveals has been responsible for the problem of democracy in Nigeria. Corruption has greatly eroded the fundamental values of democracy and the essential principle thereof; such as quality representation, accountability and responsiveness. The Nigerian political elites lack the moral fibres to champion the cause of democracy for people due to this cankerworm. Their attitude makes other citizens to become desolate and frustrated with democratic system. The democratic support by the people are totally absent because support can only come when the democratic system is assumed to be for the people’s interest not for the elite few. The paper does not said corruption explains all and remain the only factor threatening democracy in Nigeria, other variables include; ethnicity, religious bigotry,





recycling nature of political leaders, bad governance, weak party structure inter and intra party conflicts and deteriorating economy are some of the challenges of democracy in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure for stable democracy, citizens should hold their political officials accountable and responsive for their actions. Anti-corruption crusade by the government should be continue exercise. Government should empower the institutions of the state the more so as to be more powerful more than the individual. The fight against corruption should be done without any colourations of either ethnic, religious and party affiliations and anti-corruption policies should devoid of mere speech making but action oriented.

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