



Corruption and Good Governance in Nigeria, 1999-2015

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Abstract. Corruption is as old as human societies. For many years, it had been a serious threat to human existence across all the facets of life; social, political and economic. From the colonial period to the present, corruption had swept across the African terrain like a torrential rain due to certain policies put in place by the colonial project. Using primary data largely from newspaper reporting and secondary materials from both published and unpublished sources, this paper examines the nature and dynamics of corruption and anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria. Despite the efforts made by successive Nigerian governments to curb out corruption through the establishment of some anti-corruption agencies such as the ICPC and the EFCC, this paper finds out that such efforts were undermined by the seeming absence of the rule of law and capital punishments for corrupt individuals in the country. The paper therefore, concludes that corruption amongst law enforcement agencies in Nigeria such as the judiciary and the police further worsens the situation.

Keywords: Corruption, Agencies, Good Governance, Rule of Law.

1. Introduction

In one of Achebe's famous African trilogy published in 1960 entitled 'No Longer at Ease', he gives a story of Obi Okwonkwo, who is an enthusiastic young man sent to England to study Law (Achebe, 1960; Dorsinville, 1971; Zehouani, and Fridjat, 2019). Obi's intention was to become a lawyer and fight the forces of corruption in his newly independent country that has just emerged from the colonial bondage. On the contrary, he studied English language instead of Law and upon his return to Nigeria; he was employed as a Secretary to the Government's Scholarship Board. Having failed to cater for his mother's illness, pay school fees for his brother, settle his debt to the Union and help his girlfriend abort her pregnancy,

Obi resorted to corruption so as to overcome his financial challenges even against his will. This decision finally led to his downfall without achieving his initial dream. This story though published in 1960, is no doubt, a direct reflection of the lives of many Nigerians, especially in this contemporary period.

The postcolonial Nigerian state was envisaged to be a place where honest and decent citizens, as well as the brains in the country could come forward and work diligently, particularly in the installation of a 'true' democratic federal system of governance devoid of corruption and the mismanagement of public fund (Tukur, 2004). When this is achieved, there would be a national progress and the liberation of the country from its colonial ideological regimentation, which would be translated into the modernization of the educational sector, as well as social services. Like Obi, the Nigerian dream, which is far from corruption and mismanagement of resources, is more of a mirage than a reality. Thus, the pervasive nature of corruption to the extent of almost destroying the foundation of the country is glaring. This paper therefore, explains the bi-polar intricacies of the interplay of corruption on one hand, and good governance on the other.

The paper argues that the seeming absence of the rule of law and capital punishment for corrupt individuals in the country promotes corruption and the mismanagement of resources at geometric retrogression. This situation worsens by the pervasive nature of corruption amongst law enforcement agencies such as the judiciary and the police. It also concludes that the persistence of corruption in Nigeria is attributed to the under-performance of the Nigerian government and in some cases, the corrupt practices amongst the workers of the various constituted anti-corruption agencies.

Apart from giving a general overview of the various definitional dimensions of the concept of corruption, the paper traces the nature and dynamics of corruption and corrupt practices within the Nigerian state. It also brings out the major roles played by the Nigerian anti-corruption agencies such as the ICPC and the EFCC not only in the prosecution of individuals identified with financial crimes, but also in recovering billions of Naira from them. It concludes with some discussions on the causes and persistence of corruption in Nigeria.

2. Corruption in Nigeria

Though scholars have provided various definitions of corruption, which range from legal, economic, social to political perspectives, this paper defines corruption as the misplacement of priorities in all the spheres of human endeavor (ICPC, 2000). Andrig and Fjelstad observe that ‘corruption is a complex multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects as it takes on various forms and contexts’ (Andrig and Fjelstad, 2001). For this reason, corruption has no globally accepted definition, especially as it mutates based on places, circumstances and periods. To Khan however, ‘corruption’ ‘is an act, which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private interest’ (Khan, 1996). Though Khan’s definition seems to be all-encompassing, its restrictive and singular reference to only those holding public authority makes it deficient and structurally fluid.

The fact that corruption is no doubt a global phenomenon, it has permeated the fabrics of the African continent in general and Nigeria in particular (Dike, 2005; Bailard, 2009; Asongu, 2013; Okolo, P. O., & Raymond, 2014; Yagboyaju, 2017 and Page, 2018). This according to Achebe is so serious to the extent that whoever thinks ‘corruption is not alarming (in Africa)’, he does not live in the continent (Achebe, 1988). The problem of corruption in the form of embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, circumvention of rules and regulations by government officials have been existing in Nigeria at least since the colonial period. In the words of the American scholar, Newt Gingrich, while commenting on some socio-political challenges that surfaced as a result of societal corruption within America, which seem to define the Nigerian condition, argues that:

While we are, as people, winning the battle around the world, at home our elites were deserting us. For the past thirty years, we have been influenced to have lost faith in the core values, traditions, and

institutions of our civilization. The intellectual nonsense propagated... in the media, on university campuses, even among our religious and political leaders-now threatens to cripple our ability to teach the next generation to be Americans (Gingrich, 1995).

Like Gingrich, the present generation of Nigerians is also about to fail in teaching the next generation how to be Nigerians. This problem started when those in power refuse to change, let alone changing the psychology of their subjects. This also led to the growing nature of corruption, especially among the political class, which has spilled over to virtually all working environments in the country. For instance, the magic plane of Oritsajafor, which was allegedly believed to be importing weapons for massive destruction in which the majority of the victims would be youths has still not been interrogated by the Federal Government (Binniyat, Ovuakporie, Nwabughio, and Akinboade, 2014; Premium Times, 2014 and Akinlotan, 2014). Despite the effort made by George Akume, the then Senate Minority Leader who accused Pastor Ayo Oritsajafor of undermining the sanctity of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), as well as breaching the Nigerian and International laws by allowing his personal vehicle for the job to purchase the weapons at about \$9.3 million the Nigerian government did nothing to ascertain the intricacies of the event (Daily Trust, 2014).

Moreover, the allegations made against Mrs Diezani Alison Madueke who was a Minister of petroleum, was also not revised let alone taken into consideration (Sanni, 2021; Sam-Duru, 2021 and This Day, 2022). The bone of contention is that, is protecting corrupt people in the Presidential cabinet part and parcel of the so-called Transformation Agenda of President Jonathan? Or is it part of the war against indiscipline to let corrupt people go scot-free?

In Nigeria, most of the reports revolving around topical issues concerning corrupt practices and other related offences in the nation are in most cases sidelined. For instance, the reports on subsidy removal under Faruk Lawan, as well as Nuhu Ribadu’s report on some corrupt practices within the oil industry and many more, have sunk into the ocean of confusion and vagueness (Jukwey, 2012 and Innochiri, 2013).

Survey interviews conducted in Nigeria in 2003 suggest that poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and weak family structures transform the youths, as well as made them vulnerable to radicalization of all kind

(Onuaha, 2014). Typical example is the Boko-Haram insurgency. All these problems are some of the long term repercussions of corruption in governance (Douglas, and Nasidi, 2022).

Nigeria is gradually losing its battle to corruption simply because it has derailed from its historical heritage, which had once given people hope as much as leadership was concerned. According to Tukur for instance, the delineation of the Sokoto Caliphate leadership's values and goals, as derived from the principal sources are largely categorized into three; (1) Leadership (2) Community and (3) rational values (Tukur, 2004). On the contrary, all these three important factors are either missing, or completely lacking in Nigeria from the 'return' of democracy in 1999 to the present.

3. Measures Adopted by Successive Governments to Fight Corruption

The fact that the Nigerian government had been establishing various anti-corruption agencies, as well as formulating a number of policies to contain corruption is an indication to its pervasive nature in the country. Among these agencies are; Code of Conduct Tribunal, Public Complaints Commission, Public Accounts Committee, Quasi-Judicial Bodies (used mainly on an *ad hoc* basis to handle the cases of corruption swiftly and secure judgment within the shortest possible time), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), as well as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) (Oladoyin, 2012).

Though the aim of this paper is not to trace the historical development of anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria, it briefly touches on some of them as a classic example of the fierce urgency of the fight against corruption by various successive governments, especially during the Fourth Republic. With the return of democratic dispensation in 1999, many Nigerians celebrated the victory of the nation that had then emerged from the bondage of various

military regimes (Nasidi, 2020). This is because; Nigerians were disturbed about the growing nature of corruption, lack of freedom of speech and the mismanagement of resources under military governments.

Despite the liberality of democracy, it is also not watertight. Like the military regimes, it also suffers from corruption of various forms and nature. It is for this reason that in 2000 and 2003, Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian government launched its famous anti-corruption agencies popularly known as ICPC and EFCC. These agencies are empowered to investigate and prosecute corrupt individuals (Enweremadu, 2010). As part of the anti-corruption crusade, the two agencies also enlighten Nigerians via both print and non-print media on the dangers of corruption, especially as it truncates national development. In 2006 for instance, ICPC prosecuted 185 persons in a total of 91 cases throughout the country even though in 2008, the number of cases in court rose to 161 involving 309 people (Enweremadu, 2010). Despite its effort in the fight against corruption, most Nigerians and the International Community believed that the ICPC had failed not only in its operation, but also in its coverage and impact. This development finally led to the establishment of EFCC, which brought a lot of improvements. This is because, the agency unlike ICPC, has a broader coverage to include investigations of crimes of financial and economic nature, especially corruption, money laundering, 419, to mention, but a few. Its high performance in prosecuting corrupt individuals, as well as recovering illegally acquired wealth gave it an undisputed acceptance and popularity throughout the country (Enweremadu, 2010).

In 2004 and 2005 for example, EFCC recovered over N725 billion from financial crimes; both in cash and assets, while ICPC only recovered N212 million in 2005 and N3.9 billion in 2006 (Enweremadu, 2010). Table 1 below shows the variant efforts of the two anti-corruption agencies.

Table 1: Report Card of ICPC and EFCC at the end of 2006/2007, Source: (Enweremadu, 2010).

Agency	EFCC	ICPC
Number of Persons Arraigned	300+ (2006) 145 (2007)	185 (2006) 20 (2007)
Number of Persons Convicted	N25 billion (2006)	N3.9 billion (2006)

Through the concerted effort of both ICPC and EFCC in the fight against corruption, Transparency International (TI) observes that there is an improvement in Nigeria's disposition to corruption even though occupying 59th position out of 180 most corrupt nations, further shows that Nigeria is still under performing in this regard (Enweremadu, 2010). Adamolekun also opines that 'It is incontrovertible that EFCC under Nuhu Ribadu (2003-2007) took the fight against corruption to a high level with some impressive results: the recovery of about \$5 billion

from financial criminals, rogue public officials and the conviction of over 120 offenders including a former Inspector General of Police and a former state governor’ (Adamolekun, 2008; Eme, et al, 2017). Interestingly, even Ribadu’s tenure was seen by many Nigerians as being choosy in its campaign against corrupt practices, especially when it involves public office holders, which would be discussed in the next segment of this paper. Table 2 for instance, shows Nigeria’s position among 180 most corrupt nations in the world.

Table 2: Nigeria’s Score on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 1996-2008, Source: Adamolekun, L., 2008:27.

Year	ICI Score	Nigeria’s	Remarks
1996	0.69	54/54	Most Corrupt
1997	1.78	52/52	Most Corrupt
1998	1.9	81/85	2 nd Most Corrupt
1999	1.6	98/99	2 nd Most Corrupt
2000	1.2	90/90	Most Corrupt
2001	1.0	90/91	2 nd Most Corrupt
2002	1.6	101/102	2 nd Most Corrupt
2003	1.4	132/133	2 nd Most Corrupt
2004	1.6	144/146	2 nd Most Corrupt
2005	1.9	152/159	3 rd Most Corrupt
2006	2.0	142/163	5 th Most Corrupt
2007	2.2	147/180	9 th Most Corrupt
2008	2.7	121/180	59 th Most Corrupt

According to Chatham House report of 2001, about \$400 billion was stolen from the public treasury by those in power from 1960-1999 (Hoffmann and Patel, 2017). This report also throws a little new light on the fact that from 2005 to 2014, about \$182 billion was also lost to corruption and mismanagement of resources.

It should be noted that various factors serve as the major challenges of the Nigerian anti-corruption movement one of which is the pervasive nature of corruption among law enforcement agencies, particularly the judiciary and the police (Open Society Foundations, 2016; Opara, 2007). There were many cases of the collection of *quid pro quo*, which affects the smooth operation of the rule of law, justice and equity. This dubious behavior is also responsible for the breakdown of law and order in the country. This is because, those shouldered with the responsibility of enforcing, maintaining and safeguarding law and order are equally found wanting (Yusha’u, 2009). In his *The City of God*, St. Augustin of Hippo once argued that ‘*Lex iniusta non est lex*’ (An unjust law is no law at all) (Augustine, 2014).

Similarly, the legalization of the so-called ‘Immunity’ by those having executive powers from the state governors to the president is also a major factor contributing to the growth of corruption in Nigeria (Ikeze, 2013). This is because; ‘Immunity’ does not only give them chance to steal as much as they can from the public fund, but also buy them time to destroy all existing evidence that can be used against them when they are out of office.

Ethnicity and the manipulation of religion, especially by religious leaders in the country also serve as a stumbling block against the government’s anti-corruption crusade. For religious or ethnic sentiments, a section of the country protects financial crimes allegation against their own people. This act does not only obscure anti-corruption movement in Nigeria, but also gives the perpetrators confidence to legalize corruption.

The total breakdown of values that used to be cardinal principles in both governance and character formation is no doubt another contributing factor to the pervasive nature of corruption among many Nigerians irrespective of their religious inclination, gender, status, or ethnic background. This also brought to the fore, the culture of might is right to the extent that many Nigerians began to dream of attaining a special position in either the state or the Federal government with the intention of getting their own ‘share’ from the national treasury. Unfortunately, many Nigerian youths have inured themselves towards this direction. In this regard therefore, the crusade against corruption has surpassed the physical to the ideological. This is because; corruption in the country is no longer seen as a serious problem by many. Secondly, the amount of money stolen or syphoned is today what determines the corruptibility of an individual. Under normal circumstance however, the amount does not matter, but the action, which is obnoxious and against the legal and socio-cultural ethics of the foundation of not only Nigeria as a country, but the world over. With the growing rate of corruption in Nigeria, many talented youths have and are still losing various opportunities to realize their full potentialities in all

the walks of life (Jega, 2022). For instance, educational scholarships that are meant for talented and highly committed Nigerians irrespective of their socio-economic status have been cornered by those in power who decide out of their personal oblivion who enjoys such rights/privileges without transparency and reference to due process. This form of corruption also tiptoed into the Federal employment exercise. For example, the Federal Civil Service Commission, which is responsible for such exercise have already been emasculated. What is obtainable now is the distribution of slots to highly placed individuals in government who employ their relatives and friends at the detriment of the poor no matter their intellectual

capacity. This further opens new doors of corruption in the country the peak of which is the selling of Federal and State Government offers to the highest bidders.

As the corrupt government officials are acquiring more illegal wealth, the poor at the bottom of the social strata are becoming poorer. Meanwhile, many top government officials, and those in the public sector are at one time or the other hunted by the Nigerian anti-corruption commissions, especially ICPC and the EFCC. Table 3, shows the list of some of the allegedly corrupt individuals and the amount of money they stole.

Table 3: The List of selected Influential Individuals, their status and amount of money stolen, Source: Enweremadu, D.U. (2010). *Anti-Corruption Policies in Nigeria under Obasanjo and Yar'adua*, p. 20.

S/N	NAME	STATUS	AMOUNT
1.	Bode George	Ex-Chairman, Nigeria Ports Authority	N100 billion
2.	Saminu Turaki	Former Governor, Jigawa State	N36 billion
3.	Patrick Fernandez	Indian Business man	N32 billion
4.	Tom Isegholi Muhammed		N15 billion
5.	Buba and Mike Okoli	Transcorp Plc	N7.7 billion
6.	Kenny Martins	Police Equipment Fund	N6 billion
7.	Rasheed Ladoja	Former Governor of Oyo State	N5.6 billion
8.	Roland Iyayi	Ex-Managing Director of FAAN	N5.6 billion
9.	Babalola Borishade	Ex-Minister of Aviation	N5.6 billion
10.	Eider George	Austrian Businessman	N5.6 billion
11.	Chimaroke Nnamani	Senator and Ex-Governor of Enugu State	N5.2 billion
12.	Nicholas Ugbane and 9 Members of House of Representatives		N5 billion
13.	Orji Ozor Kalu	Former Governor of Abia State	N4.7 billion
14.	Nyeson Wike	Chief of Staff to Rivers State Governor	N3.6 billion

Despite the challenges debilitating against anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria, some of which have been earlier on itemized, the biggest problem is posed by the various anti-corruption agencies. For instance, when the list of the people on table 3 was made public by the EFCC, Nigerians were optimistic that due process would be followed, especially in prosecuting them. On the contrary however, most of the cases were either forgotten or silenced for reasons best known to the authorities and the alleged criminals were set free. This problem happens to be the major hindrance to the Nigerian crusade against the forces of corruption for many years.

4. Views on the Causes and Persistence of Corruption in Nigeria

The issue of corruption, its causes and persistence has attracted a lot of arguments from Nigerians, as well as international observers and researchers. However, this paper specifically focuses on the various Nigerian points of view as regards the causes and persistence of corruption in the country. The paper basically identifies four major arguments:

- Some people are of the view that the salary given to most civil servants in both the state and federal levels is so meagre that it hardly cater for their basic needs. In an attempt to find a lasting solution to this problem, they resort to corruption and misappropriation of public funds.
- Another group argues that after working as a civil servant for over thirty years, many Nigerian pensioners find it difficult to get the proper treatment they deserve from the government. In many cases, their entitlements are either hijacked or delayed by people with vested interest who invest such money in a business to earn profits. This reason too, forces many workers into corruption.
- It is also believed that upon witnessing the difficult conditions, most Nigerian pensioners find themselves in, especially in an attempt to avert the same destiny, many civil servants are bent to steal as much as they can from the public treasury and through various dubious means before their retirement.

- There is also a purely religio-didactic explanation of the causes and persistence of corruption in Nigeria. To this group, it is believed that the total breakdown of socio-cultural and moral values throughout the country is the major cause for the resurgence and persistence of corrupt practices, especially among people holding public offices. This decay they added begins from the familial to the national levels.

Interestingly, with the exception of the fourth explanation, the other viewpoints tend to confine the occurrence of corrupt practices only to the public office holders and thereby forgetting the fact that corruption permeates virtually all the spheres of human life. Corruption also manifests in private sectors, village markets, family level, schools, to mention, but just a few.

5. Conclusion

This paper briefly touched on the meaning, nature and impact of corruption on the Nigerian society. It also traced the historical development of various anti-corruption agencies not only in fighting corruption, but also in containing it simply because, there is no such corrupt free society throughout the world. It is established that most of such anti-corruption agencies like ICPC and EFCC have tried immensely in curbing out corruption and also, in recovering huge sums of money from many financial criminals.

Though anti-corruption agencies were set by various successive Nigerian governments to curb out corruption, the cases of corruption seem to have intensified more importantly because of the breakdown of law and order, decaying nature of societal values, flaws in national laws and reforms. Most importantly, this paper attributed the persistence of corruption in Nigeria to the under-performance of the Nigerian government and in some cases, the corrupt practices of the workers of the various anti-corruption agencies.

The paper also threw a little new light on the impact of corruption in Nigeria, especially as it denies many youths the chance to nurture their individual potentialities in the various fields of human endeavor. It also showed how corruption obscures the development of the nation throughout the realms of its history. For corruption to be properly tackled, there is the need for a cultural and social renaissance, the establishment of stronger, but reliable anti-corruption agency, or at least, reform the existing ones to meet up the societal needs. There is also a

strong need on the side of the government to ensure the implementation of capital punishments for people charged with corrupt practices so that it may serve as deterrence to others irrespective of their social, economic or even political status.

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