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## **Interrogating the interface between governance and corruption: The Nigerian experience**

**Fiemotongha Christopher<sup>1</sup>, Nein Godknows<sup>2</sup>, Lovegod Seaman<sup>2</sup>, Edoni Harold Harcourt<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Political Science, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education Sagbama, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

This work “Interrogating the Interface between Governance and Corruption: The Nigerian Experience”, is centred on the relationship between governance and corruption in Nigeria and how it has inhibited good governance in Nigeria. It sought to ascertain the nature, effect and perception of governance and corruption in Nigeria. It adopted the elite theory to explain the control and dominance of the political space by the political elite. The study relied on qualitative content analysis for the analyses of data. As part of the findings of the study, there is an interface between governance and corruption with the former creating a platform for the latter to thrive. That corruption is most times driven by primordial sentiment which is traceable to the multi-ethnic nature of the country, where those with the responsibility to govern give their allegiance to their ethnic groups and tribes instead of the nation. It is also discernible from the study that legislations that invoke capital punishment are required to deter potential corrupt officials. To guarantee a formidable and efficient anti-corruption agencies they (anti-corruption agencies) should be made independent through legislations.

**Keywords:** anti-corruption agencies, corruption, governance, interface, Nigeria

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### **Introduction**

Nigeria is known globally as the most populous black nation in the world, with enormous natural and human resources, but because of the ubiquitous nature of corruption in the country, she has also been identified and ranked by various global bodies as a country with endemic and pervasive corruption. Though corruption is multi-dimensional and manifests in different forms. Corruption occurs in both public and private sector in Nigeria. It is a phenomenon that has permeated the socio-economic and political life of contemporary world, manifesting in various forms (Ije Garba and Kayode, 2019) [9].

Corruption by those entrusted with governance is most dominant in Nigeria. In other words, political corruption. Governance is about the people, and it is a medium where delivery of public goods is made to the people. However, it is important to note that the concept of governance is encompassing with both good and bad governance embedded in it. In Nigeria, it is common knowledge that those entrusted with the responsibility of governance use it as a platform to indulge in corruption, and that is why the link between governance and corruption in the country is strongly established. Those saddled with the responsibility of governance have access to state fund and numerous opportunities, with the privilege to misappropriate same. This has made the struggle for political power very tense in the country, creating room for mediocres to come to governance. The situation is even made worse by the public when they celebrate public officials who display their corruptly acquired wealth. What could have plunged Nigeria into this state of pervasive corruption? One defining factor of Nigeria’s present systemic corrupt status is traceable to primordial sentiments, which emanated right from independence. From independence in 1960, the various ethnic groups jostled for space in government all with

ethnic agenda. The anti-corruption agencies have also not been well positioned to nip corruption in the bud as the laws establishing them are defective, making them subservient to the executive arm of government.

According to the Punch (2004) the government unwittingly incapacitated its own crusade against corruption by failing to diligently investigate corruption allegations and prosecuting high profile suspects. As Olu-Olu (2008) asserts “the war against corruption would be hard to win since the acts are perpetuated by the policy makers themselves.”

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study is predicated on the following objectives. To examine the relationship between governance and corruption in Nigeria. To wholistically appraise the perception and effect of corruption on governance in Nigeria. It is also intended in this study to analyze the resultant consequences occasioned by the strong link between governance and corruption.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory applied in this work is an analytical tool is the Elite Theory. Elite theorists are of the position that, governance is in practice subjected to the control of a few who are the Elites, as against the masses. The chief proponents of the Elite Theory are Vilfred Pareto and Gaetano Mosea, in the early twentieth century but made popular by Schumpeter in mid-century. In the word of Pareto (in Aggarwal 2007) “Elite consists of those successful persons who rise to top in every occupation and stratum of society, there is an elite of lawyers, an elite of mechanics and even an elite of thieves.” The Elite are few in society and wield so much power to allocate values and govern with the masses

subjected to their dictates. There are military elite, business elite, bureaucratic elite, political and governing elite (Ikelegbe, 2006) [10].

The Elite theory is employed here to describe the implied consensus among the governing elite in Nigeria to determine the direction of governance in their interest. As Ekelegbe (2006), puts it “this consensus is based on self and vested interest in the protection of the status quo.” With weak anti-corruption agencies, and several privileges at the disposal of governing elite, they indulge in corrupt practices with impunity to the detriment of the people (masses). In order to sustain themselves in government, the governing elite circumvent laid down rules including manipulating the electoral umpire.

### **The Concept of Governance**

The concept of governance is an encompassing term, that deals with several processes, with a central theme that borders on delivery of public goods. The term embodies good governance and bad governance, hence the political class and the state have always made emphasis on “Good Governance.” According to Asobie (2011) [5], governance is the process of organizing and mobilizing people and resources to achieve a common goal. It is the process of motivating and enrolling people to participate actively in dreaming dreams and seeing the vision of a possible future and then encouraging them to own the vision and use their energies, resources and contacts to work cooperatively to realize the vision, dreams and possibility. The central idea here is the delivery of public good to the people, championed by those saddled with the responsibility of driving the process of governance, who does the mobilizing, motivating and galvanizing of the governed to participate in the process of governance. The UNDP, The World Bank, OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), also sees governance as the exercise of authority or power in order to manage a country’s economic, political and administrative affairs (www.ibe.unesco.org). Good governance is expected to be participating, transparent, effective, accountable and equitable. As already pointed out, good governance entails certain basic principles such as transparency, accountability, civil participation, rule of Law, delivery on election promises, etc. Though the term is commonly used by the political class in the contemporary world, it has not truly reflected in practical terms. The potentials it holds especially in the Third World, rather it is used as a political mantra to score a political point. On the other hand, the components of bad governance some of which are corruption, exclusiveness, nepotism etc, contradicts the basic characteristics of good governance, recklessly displayed by the political class in the Third World.

### **The Concept of Corruption**

Corruption is a global and multidimensional phenomenon that pervades nation states with no consensus on its definition and meaning among scholars. Though the study of corruption has been hampered by a lack of agreement in definition, with contending views as to its actual meaning, there seem to be a consensus on the devastating effects of corruption, among nation states. There is perhaps no country that is free of corruption, but what makes it more challenging in some societies is its pervasiveness. This is evident in transparency international’s

ranking of Nigeria as the 148<sup>th</sup> country in the corruption perception index of the world in 2017, 32<sup>nd</sup> place in Africa out of 52 countries and 2<sup>nd</sup> most corrupt in West Africa.

Corruption is one of the many intractable pathologies that are better described as it occurs than conceptually defined, since its effects and implications lack coherent and definitive bounds (Igwe 2012) [8]. It embraces illegal and unacceptable practices such as fraud, embezzlement (misappropriation of corporate or public funds), bribery, nepotism, extortion, cronyism etc. The main area of concern here is that corruption is a major obstacle in the process of economic development and in the advancement of a country in all spheres. That corruption constitutes a barrier to development calls for concern and attention for developing countries. Etymologically, the term “corruption” originated from the Greek word “corruptus” meaning an aberration or a misnomer among the variety of conceptualizations of the term, Waziri (2010) [17]. In relation to the United Nations Global Programme against corruption (GPAC) corruption is defined as the “abuse of power for private gain.” Identical to this is the definition by Transparency International (2013) who sees the term corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gains.” Though conceptualizations may abound, the aim of the person or person involved in a corrupt practice is to deviate from existing rules of laws, in a clandestine or subtle manner in order to create benefits, which could be in the form of opportunities, monetary or material, for self, associates or family members.

Governments have fallen, carriers of world renowned public figures ruined, and reputations of well-respected organizations and business firms tarnished on account of corruption. Corruption inhibits development and it’s a companion to poverty especially in the Third World. As Ribadu (in Gbarabe, 2009) [7] puts it, while speaking to World Bank Group’s Senior Management (the president, managing director, vice president etc) described corruption as the cause of “horrible history of failure of leadership and failure of governance” in the developing world.

### **Causes of Corruption**

Corruption is a universal phenomenon, therefore, it has a multidimensional effect on peoples and societies of the worlds, but why individuals and groups in different societies indulge in corrupt practices varies as the situations in these societies are different. These variations are a function of how different societies are organized, structured and governed. Societies with strong political, social and economic institutions and which have a culture of transparency and accountability tend to have lower levels, fewer cases and less harmful forms of corrupt practices than societies that lack these key ingredients Asobie (in Mohammed, Aluagba and Kabar 2012). There is a plethora of causes for corrupt practices in Nigeria. Corruption has become endemic in Nigeria cutting across the length and breadth of the country, with no exception to class difference, as government functionaries, individuals and groups are all smeared in the act. Corruption in Nigeria has grown enormously in variety, magnitude and brazenness since the beginning of the second republic, because it has been extravagantly fueled by budgetary abuse and political patronage on an unprecedented scale (Achebe 2011) [1]. One major defining factor of corruption in Nigeria that makes it evidently pervasive, is primordial sentiments fueled by

a siege mentality, traceable to multi-ethnicity. As evident from the first republic, the allegiance of political office holders and ethnic nationals tended to be more to their regions and ethnic groups than to the nation. This was reflected in the structure of the political parties as none was national in outlook. As Awa (in Alapiki 2004) <sup>[3]</sup> captures it on the eve of independence, the leaders naturally made their appeal to kinship, the clan reaction or ethnic competition tended to assume a pathological character. In order words, their primordial interest were furthered ahead of national interest, which translated to ethnic nationalities and politicians from the regions jostling for appointments in the central government with the reconceived motive of having access to the national wealth in order to use it for the development of their primordial public. Therefore, any circumstance where there is a conflict of interest between the primordial public and the civil public, Nigerians tend to protect their primordial interest at the expense of the civil public. Other contending factors that engenders corruption in Nigeria are; weak institutions, politics of exclusion, lack of accountability, poverty, inequity and the ostentatious lifestyle of a neo-colonial political elite. The motivation for corruption is strong in Nigeria. This is exacerbated by general poverty, and declining standard of living Asobie (in Mohammed, Aluaigha and Kabir, 2012) <sup>[12]</sup>. In a bid to maintain an ostentatious lifestyle already cultivated by the political class which their legitimate earning cannot sustain, they bend the rules to have access to public fund. Political godfatherism is another factor responsible for corrupt practices in Nigeria. The support given by a godfather to a godson during election, because an investments when the godson is voted into office. As Ayaode (2006) <sup>[6]</sup> explains, the initial support given by the godfather becomes an investment with a colossal rate of returns because the godfather becomes the 'de' facto' person in government. Opportunities are rare and difficult to come by in Nigeria, hence those who fund themselves in positions of power keep it to themselves and their associates excluding the perceived opposition.

Another causative factor for corrupt practices in Nigeria is weak institutions. Strong institutions are a veritable tool in the fight against corruption in developed societies, but it is otherwise in Nigeria, the institutions established to fight corruption are weak due partly to the fact that they cannot confront the executive who established them. They have been accused of doing the bidding of the executive, which is a pointer to the inability of the anti-corruption agencies to prosecute highly placed government functionaries. As Adewole (2009) <sup>[2]</sup> sums it up, there are structures and indeed laws in place to checkmate corruption, these structures are however, not fully used to carry out assignments which is borne out of poor funding and/or the itching fingers of the officials who are saddled with responsibility of governance.. Weak institutions motivates the persistence of corruption as corrupt persons will continue to indulge in corrupt practices once they realize the institutions cannot deter them.

### **Governance in Nigeria**

Governance in Nigeria has not really had much to offer those who gave it its legitimacy right from the first republic to contemporary Nigeria. There is a conceptual difference between democratic governance and authoritarian system of governance, but in practical terms, there is no clear-cut distinction between the

various military administrations in Nigeria and democratic governance in the country, in terms delivery of the dividends of governance.

Governance is conceived as the "exercise" of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage society's problems and affairs" (World Bank 1991) <sup>[18]</sup>. Governance is all about the people, who are embodied in society. The management of society's problems and affairs by those saddled with this responsibility, could be done through different systems of governance. Democratic governance is globally accepted to day and practiced in Nigeria because conceptually, it is considered the best form of government, and embodies the principles of democracy, such as majority rule, popular sovereignty, the rule of law, popular participation, political equality, popular consultation and guarantees minority rights.

The Nigerian state has lost the essence of governance, though the various military administrations in the past could be excused because they are authoritarian regimes that came into power through the barrel of the gun, but for us as a nation to profess democratic governance and still exhibit misgovernance is unacceptable. As Kaplan (1999) <sup>[11]</sup> captures it, "the democracy we are encouraging in many poor parts of the world is an integral part of transformation toward new forms of authoritarianism." Why is there absence of political equality, rule of law, popular consultation etc. if we truly practice democratic governance? The system of governance in Nigeria contradicts the true principles of democratic governance. The governance system in the country amounts to a display of the dominant interest of the few ruling political elite against the interest of the majority. To further this interest, they have indulged in corrupt practices that amounts to denying the Nigerian people the dividends of democratic governance. Hence there is widespread poverty, lack of basic infrastructure, high level of illiteracy and unemployment, a steady decline in standard of living over the years and a general state of helplessness. This is even made worse, as those empowered with the responsibility of governance in the country seem to be implicitly cultivating a political culture that make bad governance an accepted practice, as long as such illegally acquired wealth could be made to go round or used deceptively without reference to its legitimacy. And that is why to be in government and continue to be relevant, the neo-colonial the Nigerian political class employ all manner of indecent means to remain in government. This is so because money and materialism has taken the place of societal value system. The society today accords recognition to those who have access to the rich and wealthy which explains why those who have the opportunity to steal do not hesitate to do so (Yahaya, 2011) <sup>[20]</sup>. With the present spate of recklessness of those in governance in the country, there is the need to put in place punitive measures to check and contain the excesses of the political class in a bid to curb corruption, though this can only be championed by a patriotic and nationalistic leaders. Apparently informed by the lack luster nature of the country's approach to taming corruption, a suggestion is made for Nigeria to follow the part of the Asian countries by introducing the capital punishment as a measure to deter corrupt and potential corrupt officials (Mudapher 2011) <sup>[13]</sup>.

### **Interrogating the Interface between Governance and Corruption**

Governance is a two way concept. It either creates a platform for the accomplishment of the promises of democracy, which is good governance, or contrary-wise it could create an enablement for the prevalence of corruption, an attribute of bad governance, which inhibits the delivery of public goods to the people. The link between corruption and governance in Nigeria has been overwhelming both in military and democratic dispensations. It is this link that has created the room for the dominance of corruption in our political space, with every incoming government promising to address the menace of corruption but funding themselves in a state of helplessness in the end. Indeed, since 1996, no federal government in Nigeria has failed to make the fight against corruption an aspect of its reform programmes. Political corruption is also cited from time to time, by insurgents and rebellious groups in Nigeria as the major reason for their acts of insurgency or rebellion. (Asobie in Mohammed, Aluaigba and Kabir, 2012) <sup>[12]</sup>. Politics create a platform for corruption to flourish in Nigeria. With millions unemployed and no source of livelihood with very many jostling for very few positions made available by the state, the potential political office holder goes into governance with the pre-conceived motive of making for himself, his family, or associates enough that can sustain them and sometimes even unborn generations, and this can only be achieved through corrupt practices. Governance gives access to the limited opportunities created by the state, as well as an opportunity to serve and develop the state and the individual, but because of the unknown, those who find themselves in governance violate the rules of governance for personal aggrandizement. Though some have maintained integrity in governance, there are several corruption cases in the country that have demonstrated the deep seated nature of corruption in the country. As Transparency International Report (2018) concludes, with this report, it means Nigeria is still perceived as a country deep in corruption without clear policies to address the menace of corruption. In other words, governance is perceived as a leeway to perpetrate corruption in Nigeria, as those who do not have access to governance cannot also have the leverage it provides.

It is worthwhile to highlight some of the corruption cases recorded in the fourth republic under the administration of president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010-2015), and president Mohammedu Buhari (2015 to date) as corruption continues to consolidate through governance owing to the premium placed on wealth, whether ill-gotten or legitimate. In Nigeria, there is the use of political office to enrich one's self and associates and this is not seen however as corruption in as much as the persons involved are seen as contributing such ill-gotten wealth to the welfare and development of his or her community (Osaghae 2011) <sup>[14]</sup>. These administrations in the fourth republic have continued to pamper corrupt officials who are party, men or women therefore, compromising the fight against corruption. The Central Bank Governor Sanusi Lamido Sanusi informed former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2013 that the state owned oil Company NNPC failed to remit US \$20 billion in oil revenue to the state, but President Jonathan instead jettisoned the claims and subsequently sacked Sanusi for mismanagement. A committee

set up by the senate also found Sanusi's account to be lacking in merit. After an audit of the NNPC's account, it was pronounced the NNPC is yet to remit \$1.48 billion to the federal government. At the tail end of former President Goodluck Jonathan's government, the PWC and Deloitte report showed proof of about \$20 billion misappropriated by the NNPC. The question here is who was prosecuted and convicted for this missing or misappropriated fund? It was also alleged that \$2.2 billion was illegally withdrawn from the excess crude accounts of which \$1 billion was approved by Goodluck Jonathan for his second term campaign without prior information to the National Economic Council. This is evident of the impunity sometimes demonstrated by the executive arm perhaps because they established the anti-corruption agencies, and recognizes, they can only back but cannot bite, especially against the executive. According to a NEITI report, losses due to crude oil swaps as a result of subsidy and domestic crude allocation from 2005-2012 shows that \$11.63 billions was paid to the NNPC, but there was no evidence of the money being remitted to the federation account. No doubt corruption was recklessly perpetrated in the fourth republic under Goodluck Jonathan but is furthered and exacerbated under the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. Though President Muhammadu Buhari's administration introduced the whistle blower policy which has led to the recovery of some looted funds in the country, it has recorded some heart-rending corruption cases, bordering even on the integrity of Mr. President. One of the early evidence of corruption was at the launching of the National Re-orientation Campaign tagged "change begin with me" it was discovered that the speech of Mr. President was lifted from the 2008 inaugural speech of US President Obama. This was an embarrassment to the country. Though Mr. President later apologized for this act. In fact, nothing could be more demeaning for us as a nation than the certificate saga involving the President, where the subjects he claimed to have written were only introduced in the 1960s. a senate ad-hoc committee led by Senator Shehu Sani in 2016 indicted the then secretary to the government of the federation, Mr. Babachir Lawal for the misappropriation of a N200 million contract scandal meant for the clearing of 'invasive plant species' in Yobe State by his own company. Though President Buhari sacked Babachir Lawal on October 30, 2017 following the investigation by a three man panel headed by vice president Yemi Osinbajo obviously his prosecution and conviction was compromised.

No doubt, governance and corruption are concepts that are not new to national governments and societies, however, their application and perception have been shaped by environmental and other factors across societies. There is a common belief that governance and corruption has a connection, as it is clearly evident above, the corruption cases cited involved those saddled with the responsibility of governance, implicitly or explicitly creating a perception which sees governance as a platform for corruption. The advocates of democratic governance should also not run into hasty conclusions, that all States that profess democratic governance are truly democratic, though democracy has become prevalent, but it is also far from being triumphant (Rouke and Boyer, 2002) <sup>[15]</sup>.

### Findings

The wholistic process of governance could breed either good governance or bad governance. These two dimensions could be determined by those saddled with the responsibility of governance. It is observed in this work that corruption is a dominant characteristics of bad governance in Nigeria. It could be interfered from this study that governance and corruption are intertwined with the former creating of platform for the latter to strive in Nigeria. It is observed in this work that corruption is a dominant characteristics of bad governance and that governance and corruption are intertwined with the former creating a platform for the latter to flourish in Nigeria. It is of the finding of this study that corruption places a burden on the people and not of those entrusted with governance and that is why they exhibit a nonchalant attitude when corruption persists in the face of anti-corruption agencies. Obviously, there is a Disconnect between the people and those in governance evident in social class inequality occasioned by corrupt practices. Nigeria has become a safe haven for corruption because the anti-corruption agencies are weak and cannot confront the very arm of government that established them. Currently, the anti-corruption laws of the country are not punitive enough to attract deterrence. Today there is a general perception in Nigeria, that to find one's self in governance is a privilege to enrich one's self, family members and friends. It is discernible that opportunities are rare in Nigeria, hence those who find themselves in government indulge in corrupt practices to provide for generations yet unborn.

### Conclusion

Governance has created a platform for those saddled with the responsibility to govern to consistently indulge in corrupt practices, and this has established a strong link between governance and corruption in the country as the struggle to be in governance continue to intensify, placing the burden on the masses. To tackle the problem of corruption head-on in Nigeria, stringent punitive measures should be put in place, such as, the capital punishment applicable in some Asian countries, to deter corrupt and potential corrupt officials from indulging in corruption.

### Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made:

1. Legislation that will ensure the independence of anti-corruption agencies and make them far apart from the executive must be put in place, to make the fight against corruption in Nigeria a formidable one.
2. Enact laws that will deter potential corrupt officials by invoking capital punishment for offenders.
3. Special anti-corruption courts should be established through nomination by the people and ratified by the legislature to quicken all corruption cases to serve as a check on those in government.
4. There should be a regeneration of our value system and deliberate steps should be taken to re-orient the political class, this could be championed by civil society groups.
5. Primordial sentiments persists today because there is not enough for all, therefore, emphasis should be on good governance at all levels of government, to driven by a

nationalistic and patriotic leadership to give a sense of belonging to all, in heterogeneous Nigeria. A virile civil society is needed to mobilize the people for electoral reform that can ensure the emergence of patriotic and nationalistic leadership.

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