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## **CORRUPTION: THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF OUR DEMOCRACY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria has undergone close to two decade of military authoritarian rule from 1983 thus, clamoring for return to democratic rule has hasten, the enthusiasm that greeted the 1999 handover of government to a democratically elected civilian government was very high. But immediately after the dust has settled the differences between a military dictator and the democratic government became blurred, the citizens were denied the dividend of democracy they so much clamored for. Thus the study tried to unravel the extent to which corruption has become the stumbling block to profitable democratic governance in Nigeria. And prescribe some way out of the vicious circle.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigerian since independence had been trying to entrench a democratic governance and rule in its society, which had seemingly been impossible. Although the word democracy is very sweet to the tongue, ear, so appealing was the concept that every nations /individuals want to be associate and identified with it. The popularity of democratic governance was enhanced as from 1980s through to the 1990s and present day. This became so as a result of the collapsed of socialist regime and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. So fancy and appealing is the democracy that a military dictator in Nigeria had once preferred to be called *President* a name that is more befitting a democratically elected person rather than a usurper. Be that as it may, democracy, which was famously and popularly defined to reflect the participation of the generality of the people, and seen as government by the consent of the people and was defined by a former American president Abraham Lincoln as *government of the people by the people and for the people'* The reflective meaning of this is that, the people share the right in selecting /electing their leaders, by being freely participate in the electoral process, they equally have the right to participate in running the government by suggesting and making constructive/positive criticism in the policy formulation and implementation of the government so installed. The people are supposedly to benefit directly or indirectly from the government by obtaining an improved life and generosity of government from their leaders.

The point is that these are unobtainable in Nigeria democratic government right from the time of independence to the present. It is my opinion that corruption is the stumbling block of the non-attainability of both democratic culture and the dividend of democracy in Nigeria, which incessantly had necessitate coups and counter coups in Nigeria body policy. The paper therefore, intends to look at the multi-facet indices of corruption in the Nigerian body policy by looking at; it meaning, modus operandi and it effect on underdevelopment of Nigeria body polity.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### Democracy

Democracy was once described by one time British Prime Minister Churchill in 1947 as *the worst form of government except all other forms that had been tried from time to time*, many definition had been attached to democracy from time to time so much so that Bernard (1993) sensed that democracy is fast losing its original meaning when he said that, *democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the public affairs... a term that can mean anything to anyone is in danger of meaning nothing at all*. Providing a concise definition of democracy is more Herculean than doing any other task in the world, because of what Bernard refers to above and more precisely because of what Jega (2007) refers to when he said *that attempting to conceptualized or theorized democracy have becomes too amorphous and imprecise... the concept means different thing to different people*. Some of the meanings popularly attached to the definition of democracy as highlighted by Heywood (2007) are as follows;

- A form of government in which the people rule themselves directly without the need for professional politicians or public officials.
- A society based on equal opportunity, individual merits, rather than hierarchy or privilege.
- A system of rule by the poor disadvantaged
- A system of decision making based on the principle of majority rule.
- A system of rule that secures the rights and interests of the minorities by placing checks upon the power of the majority.
- A means of filling public offices through a competitive struggle for the popular vote.
- A system of government that serves the interests of the people regardless of their participation in political life.

All these are applicable to democratic rule, but it should be noted that the Nigerian term easily bears the direct opposite of the above enumerated features.

### CORRUPTION

Corruption is defined as *a condition of depravity or moral defilement* Heywood (2007) contends that corruption is those that breed appetite for domination and insensitivity to the suffering of others, more specifically according to Heywood (2007) who sees power corruption as is the case in Nigeria in quasi-legal terms, thus meaning *a failure to carry out proper public responsibilities, because of the pursuit of private gain usually material*, because in most cases corruption has a material or narrowly financial character, its most common political manifestation being bribery. Corruption in Ribadu's (2005) view *is an abuse of public office for private gains*; he further expanded it, especially to reflect what took place in the private sector, and sees it *as misuse of private or public fund /office/power/position for private benefits*. This seemingly all-encompassing definition of Ribadu could still be enriched, especially when we considered Odojin and Omojuwa (2007) having subscribed to the definition of corruption, concluded that corruption could be defined in terms of public office centres, and this focuses primarily on those behavioural practices that violate the legal and formal standards regulating public office. At this stage they quoted Nye (1967) who

described *corruption as behaviour which derivates from the normal duties of a public rule because of private... pecuniary or status gains or violate rules against the exercise of certain types of private influence and there may includes such behavoiur as bribery, nepotism, misappropriation etc.* The second aspect of the definition as put forward by Odofin and Omojuwa (2007) was called market centre, which they refers to as coming from the economists thus deriving their premises from economics theory. Corruption is therefore, seen *as an exchange of money for political decision (assets) which private sector seek to acquire (demand)and public agents are just willing to sell (supply) by avoiding being caught (liability).* What they we trying to say in essence is that, whenever there is window of opportunity, a corrupt civil servant regarded his public offence as a business and a maximizing unit, where the size of his market depends upon the market situation and his talents for finding the point of maximal gain on the public curve.

In the same vein, Rose (1978) as an expanded version of market centre definition of corruption *as essentially about all payments legally or illegally to agents that are not passed on to superiors, but also include a series of illegal activities with similar public policy consequences such as campaign contributions, lobbying.* The third side of the definition is public interest centre, and it sees corruption as a composition of the body politics, through moral decay. This means a deviation from certain standards of behaviour were corruption is viewed as behaviour which does not necessarily implies a break of law, trust or code of conduct, but still involve a serious violation of the standard, and especially those standard associated with public rule. For instance, to look the other way when corruption is been perfected, the worst form of corruption especially that relate to the topic of this study were those emanates and radiate around elections and selection for public responsibility. This is because it one thing for the mass public to truly elect a corrupt officer to the post of trust knowingly or unknowingly it another thing for a corrupt officer to actually force his/her self on the people through vote rigging, vote buying, false declaration of candidates, disruption of election victory to favour a particular candidate, etc.

### ***Why is our polity so corrupt during democratic era?***

Having understood the definitional meanings of democracy, corruption and it gravity on our political cum economy and social life and also our perception of democracy might be enriched, through understanding of it meaning, beauty and the limitation placed on people's control on it decision making process. The question to ask is why our polity is so corrupt especially in the democratic era, despite the existences of rule of law, freedom of speech and expression etc. In line with this, Awolowo (1983) opinioned that politics has been redefine in Nigeria as *the process of gaining control of public resources for the pursuit of private and selfish ends.* This has being the behaviour of our leaders since independence. As long as this will continue to be the guiding principle of our elites, so will corruption continue and so we will continue to fail to get it right. This has been clearly seen in the proceeding of the Nation's National Assembly where members were allegedly knew and do nothing rather than sharing the national resources among themselves. Our system is corrupt more because the constitution as so many loopholes. For example the immunity clause that intended to protect

the elected leaders from been unnecessarily diverted from the state activities as been mischievously used as a safe haven for continuously looting the nation's treasury.

**Corruption: the mitigating factor against the success of democracy in Nigeria.**

Historically, democratic governing was bequeath to Nigeria at independent in 1960, ironically the seemingly democratic government fell in 1966, ostensibly the leader were been accused of corrupt practices, mainly on nepotism, embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds, etc. Since 1966, corruption has been the major reason for rise and fall of various regimes that come to be in Nigeria. For example Gowon regime (1966-1975), was overthrown on account of corruption. Odofin and Omojuwa (2007) attested to the facts that the fight against corruption by Murtala/Obasanjo regime that lead to the enthronement of a democratic government in 1979 did not see their effort preventing the Shagari government from sliding to the debris of corruption. With the Buhari/Idiagbon led regime the impetus to stage the 1983 coup was on account of corruption. IBB regime takes the centre stage in the term of corrupt regimes in Nigeria. Likewise the Abatcha era up to 1998, the short regime of Abdulsalami that successfully fulfill the dream of Nigeria to become a democratic society was not left behind in the antic of corruption. Worst still he not only enmeshed in financial misappropriation /embezzlement, but dwell much in nepotic enthronement of civilian government that turned out to be the worst regime Nigeria ever had, be it military or civilian. And the dust is still following us till date.

From the fact on ground the study believed that the worst form of corruption a society could be exposed to is that of electoral corruption. This is because it will produce bad leaders no matter how good the leader may be. Because oxford dictionary define corruption as; *something that is no longer in its original form, or dishonesty or wicked behaviour*. So if that is the case, then how can we expect anything good to come through a corrupt process? Talking about Yar'adua's enthronement in 2007, despite clarity of the rigged 2007 election to even the beneficiary (Yar'Adua) to have warranted his mentioning it in his maiden speech, and to have recognized how faulty and corrupt election could be in Nigeria. But because of the privilege attach to leadership in Nigeria the *Leviathan* status of our leaders, when the bubble is about to boost at the Supreme Court, one could read how stumble and confuse the chairman of Supreme Court was while delivery his judgment.

Dele (2004) vividly explain how selfish and parochial nature of the governing class has increase overtime, when he observed that *politics has created a terrain for easiest means to wealth and relevance ...*, to his observation you see a lot of criminal that wanted to escape the long arm of law quickly fund a candidate or contesting for elective post in order to acquire immunity and thus; escape prosecution. That is why the National Assembly was unable to make any meaningful change in our dear life and nation.

**The Electoral Process and Prevalence of Corruption in our Democratic Governance**

One of the major areas which corrupt our democratic system of governance is in the region of election and electoral process. The whole corruption that bedeviled the society started at

this stage. However, with exception of some elections conducted by the colonial master, majority of election in Nigeria had been smothered in rigging, fraud, gerrymandering and all sort of corruption in favour of most preferred candidate.

Therefore, to begin to clear the society of corruption is to begin to conduct free, fair and acceptable elections. As rightly observed by Transition Monitoring Group's final report of 2003 general election;

*Elections are a complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed on one another. It can be defined as a form, act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behavior. It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance. Elections are not necessarily about Election Day activities although it forms an important component. It encompasses activities therefore, during and after elections. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of elections, the registration of political parties and party campaigns, and the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access. It includes campaign financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register. It includes the independence or lack of it of electoral agencies and organs. It includes, the liberalism or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies of election.*

Activities toward 2011 election did not show a change in our attitude toward a credible election. The atmosphere shows a domineering incumbency in all ramifications, meaning that politicians are hell bent in using their status to win election and once the will of the people fail to determine a winner then it back to square one.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Nigeria the study observed has been variously denied the dividend of democracy, and that this occurs mainly because of corrupt practices. It equally notes that this corruption has permeated throughout the societal echelons, thus demanding a general operation to dislodge. It is the belief of this study that, if Nigeria must progress economically and otherwise the government must be good, transparent and accountable to the people. The achievement the above the study believe should be anchored on the process of selecting the leaders which be freed of all forms of corruption. Therefore we have to sanitize our electoral process not only by bringing astute individuals on board, but more importantly to give them the enabling environment to succeed. Also our corruption fighting machines should be made vibrant and potent with less government interferences that will allows them to discharge their duties without fear or favour. The citizens must be enlighten and educated on the need for them to participate actively in governance at all level. Finally the well-being and betterment of the people should be the purpose of government

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