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THE WAR AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: DEVOURING OR SHARING THE NATIONAL CAKE?

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Abstract

That corruption abounds in Nigeria is an indisputable fact (Agbiboa, 2012). The corrupt man is everywhere, the man on the street, the man next door, the man in the church or mosque, the man in the market or the departmental store, the policeman on beat patrol and the soldier at the check point (Okadigbo, 1987). Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage (Achebe, 1983). The rate of corruption is so high that the Federal House of Representative in Nigeria is now contemplating hanging for treasury looters as a solution to corruption (Ige, 2016). Corruption is a clog in the wheel of progress in Nigeria and has incessantly frustrated the realization of noble national goals, despite the enormous natural and human resources in Nigeria (Ijewereme, 2015). Corruption cases have been on the increase despite anti – corruption crusades (Izekor & Okaro, 2018). Corruption dynamics in Nigeria reveal that politicians and public office bearers in Nigeria have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that they are not able to translate their anti – corruption “gospel” into action; theirs is to devour rather than share the “national cake”. Today Nigerians continue to languish in extreme poverty and yet Nigeria is one of the few African countries with abundant natural and human resource endowments. Nigerian political leadership (ruling or opposition) should be more serious when dealing with corruption, if economic growth and development is anything to go by in Nigeria. This study seeks to demystify the dynamics of both political and electoral corruption in Nigeria in relation to the Nigerian political landscape. Amongst other policy recommendations, the study urges Nigerian politicians to walk their talk on corruption.

Key Words: Corruption, Electoral corruption, Political corruption, Politicians, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption, which has almost become part of African culture; is one of the major social vices that have been ravaging the African society (Ige, 2016). Well – endowed in terms of human and natural resources, it is ironic that Nigeria remains one of the most under – developed countries of the world, largely because of the menace of corruption (Aleyomi, 2013). Corruption has become a crankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria’s development and a way of doing things (Obadan, 2001; Omotola, 2007). Corruption is the misuse of entrusted power or a dishonest use of one’s office or position for personal gain (Ijewereme, 2015). Corruption can also be operationally defined as the destruction of anything from original form of purity by means of bribery or favor for one’s private gain (Nyoni, 2017). Corruption is a monster and enemy to a country by which dishonest persons abuse and exploit public wealth (Usman, 2011; Okoye, 2016). It is a cancerous global phenomenon, which has continued to cripple the developmental efforts of Nigeria (Obuah, 2010a).

Corruption is being reported daily (Malgwi, 2004; Obuah, 2010a & b; Ogbeidi, 2012; Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013) such that in many instances it has become the order of the day (Naziru & Zaleha, 2016). The spate of corruption in Nigeria has led to a state of crises of underdevelopment, low technological development, debt peonage, endemic balance of payments crises, decaying

infrastructure, decaying cities, continuously deteriorating capacity of managing external and internal conditions, continuous declines in living standards, as well as ever increasing crime profile (Balogun & Okediji, 2014). Corruption is Nigeria's worst problem; it is responsible for all kinds of woes such as election rigging, failed promises, abandoned projects, poor quality of implemented projects, dilapidated infrastructure, nepotism, instability in Niger Delta, and impediment to flow of foreign direct investment (Obuah, 2010b). The Nigerian public sector is where corruption thrives most (Eddy & Akpan, 2008; Imhonopi & Urim, 2013; Casimir *et al*, 2014) as many public officials see official engagement as avenue to enriching oneself and not a service to the country (Casimir *et al*, 2014).

There are a number of types of corruption, in general. In this study, we look only at political and electoral corruption and how these two types of corruption are related to the political landscape of Nigeria. It is public secret that these are the most rampant types of corruption in Nigeria. Today, Nigeria looks like a cursed country, arguably because of both political and electoral corruption.

II. THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL & ELECTORAL CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Political Corruption

Political corruption can be defined as that kind of corruption that is initiated and facilitated by political office bearers. Political corruption is usually fueled by those who want to remain in power, for reasons better known to themselves. Political corruption occurs at the highest levels of political authority. It takes place when the politicians who are entrusted with the national duty to formulate, establish and implement the laws for the benefit of the whole nation, are themselves corrupt. Such politicians usually manipulate policies and legislation for private gain. Political corruption is caused by non – other than greed and selfishness. Nigerian political landscape continues to be characterized by political corruption despite all the efforts done to curb corruption in Nigeria.

Electoral Corruption

This type of corruption is closely related to political corruption. Electoral corruption involves all forms of electoral malpractice such as vote – buying, favour, election rigging, coercion and intimidation. In Nigeria, the losers usually end up being declared as winners in presidential elections and votes are frequently obtained in areas where no vote was cast nor election held and the reason behind all this menace is electoral corruption. If political administrations are to be regarded as legitimate in Nigeria, then electoral corruption has to come to an end first.

Political & Electoral Corruption in Nigeria (1960 – date)

Upon attaining her independence from Britain, Nigeria inherited the British cabinet system of government in which Mr. Alhaji Balewa was the Prime Minister and Mr Azikiwe was the president (1960 – 1966). The newly formed government did not go anywhere because the politicians of that time prioritized their self interests. Political corruption gave way to political disorder which resulted in the 1966 military coup; which saw the rise of Major General Aguyi Ironsi. From this period, it is quite imperative to note that Nigeria has been ruled by the military for approximately 29 consecutive years. The involvement of the military in the political landscape in Nigeria fueled corruption greatly. Due to rampant political corruption in Nigeria, Major General Aguyi Ironsi's leadership did not go anywhere.

In fact, in 1967, a military coup was staged and that coup paved way for General Yakubu Gowon (1967 – 1975). Gowon, just like Ironsi did little to control corruption in Nigeria. During Gowon's time, political corruption escalated in Nigeria and almost became a normal way of life. Upon realizing

that Gowon was not a good leader, another coup was staged and it saw Murtala Mohammed (Olusegun Obasanjo: 1975 – 1979) becoming president of Nigeria in 1975. Murtala's government took necessary steps to curb corruption but the main problem with his strategy was that Mr Murtala was mainly focused on perceived enemies. The corruption cases which were investigated were those of perceived enemies, his allies were left out. Following a military coup led by Lt. Col. Dimka, Obasanjo left office and Sheshu Shagari took over in 1979. Shagari's government (1979 – 1983) was characterized by political and electoral corruption and serious ethnic conflicts. Between the years 1979 and 1983, Shagari and his team are believed to have been trying to manipulate the state apparatus in order to win elections. By public demand, Shagari's government was thrown out of office after the people became fully convinced that the 1983 elections had been rigged. The exit of Shagari saw General Mohammed Buhari rising into power.

In his first stint as president of Nigeria (1983 – 1985), Buhari tried as much as possible to arrest all the people who were convicted of corrupt practices but the unfortunate part of it is that these were his perceived enemies. The political administration (Babangida: 1985 – 1993) that followed was a mockery to the generality of Nigerians because instead of dealing with corruption, they actually provided an environment for its growth and development. After having failed to lead the nation properly, Babangida had to step aside in 1993 at a time when the "12 billion dollars" issue was at its boiling point. Babangida tried to play around with electoral corruption which saw his government annulling the 1993 presidential election under unclear circumstances but by the end of the year 1993, Babangida's formed interim government was kicked out of office and General Abacha (1993 – 1998) took over as president of Nigeria. Abacha's government is well known for massive looting which resulted in the broking down of 4 refineries of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

The passing on of Abacha paved way for General Abubakar (1998 – 1999) in 1998 pending a democratic regime which was at the helm of Nigeria in 1999, led by Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2007). For the second time at the helm of Nigeria, Obasanjo was now very strict about corruption and any person found on the wrong side of law was made to see the full wrath of law. The Ya'Adua (2007 – 2010) led government did its best to deal with corruption in Nigeria but unfortunately, it did not exceed the standards set by Olusegun Obasanjo and therefore he lost the 2011 presidential elections to Goodluck Jonathan (2011 – 2014). The Jonathan led government did not take any serious measures against corruption in Nigeria, especially political corruption. In fact, most Nigerians blame the Jonathan led government and accuse it of causing untold sufferings on the life of many Nigerians. The current president, Honourable Buhari, is doing his best to deal with corruption in Nigeria. However, the way the Boko Haram issue is being handled leaves a lot to be desired. Corruption, political or electoral, is just bad and nothing else. In Nigeria both political and electoral corruption are rampant. Democracy and rule of law are yet to be experienced in Nigeria.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Nigerian political leaders and public office holders should walk their talk on corruption. Rebuking corruption is quite important but the most important thing after all has been said; is to WALK THE TALK. The "Change Begins With Me" mantra will remain a pipe dream until all Nigerians start walking their talk. It is important to remember that corruption in Nigeria continues to destroy the legitimacy of political administrations in Nigeria.
- ii. Corruption in Nigeria should be condemned at all levels, in this regard; politicians and public office bearers MUST lead by example. This is quite important because when a leader is corrupt, definitely his/her followers will also be corrupt.

- iii. In the distribution of national resources (*the national cake*), a merit approach should be adopted. Nigerians have a well – known history of devouring rather than sharing the national cake. This is not good at all. The national cake should NOT be distributed on the basis of tribalism, favoritism, nepotism, state of origin and so forth.
- iv. In order to win the war on corruption, adherence to ethical standards in decision making must be the foundation of the nation’s policies (Adekoya, 2006).
- v. Anti – corruption agencies¹ in Nigeria should NOT waste their precious time pursuing perceived political enemies. That kind of approach to corruption is sycophantic and malicious. Politicians should desist from their dubious tendency of attempting to influence the activities of anti – corruption agencies. The time to **call a spade a spade** has come.
- vi. Corrupt public officers should be dismissed with immediate effect and their properties should be seized.
- vii. Christians in Nigeria should adopt John² the Baptist’s approach to corruption, after all; God – fearing people SHOULD NEVER engage in corrupt activities, thus says the Word.
- viii. The Muslim community in Nigeria also has a very important role to play in the fight against corruption. This is quite imperative because the Holy Qur’an **strictly rebukes** those “who tell a lie against Allah and (well) they know it!”³

IV. CONCLUSION

In Nigeria it is not only that officials are corrupt, but that corruption is official (Adesina, 2011). The fact that no significant change has been reflected in the attitude of the average Nigerian towards corruption is irksome (Chuta, 2012). No country is 100% corruption – free but what is happening in Nigeria cannot go unnoticed. Corruption is an enigma that continues to compromise the sustainable economic growth and development of Nigeria.

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¹ Such as the Economic & Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)

² Matt. 3:2 – 6 (See Holy Bible)

³ Q2: 174; Q3: 77 & 78; Q5: 13; Q41: 40 (See Holy Qur’an)

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