

**CORRUPTION: THE BANE OF SUCCESSIVE WAVES OF DEMOCRATIZATION
PROCESS IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999 TILL DATE**

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Abstract

Nigeria, a multi ethnic nation is a country that has been plagued by corruption. This plague has seriously become the bane of successive waves of democratization process in Nigeria since 1999 till date. Despite the well-publicized efforts by the government in tackling corruption. Corruption continues to hamper the growth of the country. Corruption which means to destroy is the intentional neglect of a recognized duty or the unwanted exercise of power with the motive of acquiring some advantage at the expense of others. This ugly trend has hampered the smooth and successful democratization process in Nigeria. This paper therefore examined some corrupt practices inherent in the democratization process in Nigeria since 1999 till date. The findings revealed that since 1999 till date avalanche corrupt practices abound in the successive waves of democratic process in Nigeria. There is need therefore, for re-orientation and awakening of patriotic spirit among the citizens. The judiciary, the executive and the legislature should be encouraged to live above board. This paper adopted historical approach by analyzing and demonstrating those corrupt practices in the democratization process in Nigeria since 1999 till date

Keywords: Corruption, Democratization, Orientation, Judiciary, Executive, Legislature.

Introduction

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, marking the beginning of the fourth republic, the country has started a journey towards consolidating its democratic institutions and process. This journey after decades of military rule was regarded as an avenue for political

stability that will bring about dividends of democracy such as; enhanced governance, the respect for the rights of citizens and economic development. Unfortunately, after over two decades of democracy, the democratization process has been consistently undermined by corruption. Corruption is a systemic malaise that has permeated deeply into governance and continues to erode the gains of democracy, causing delusions on the promise of democracy for the Nigerian populace. According to Urien (2012), “corruption comes from a Latin word “*corruptus*”, which means “to destroy”. In this context, corruption therefore, is the intentional neglect of a recognized duty or the unwanted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining some advantage more or less directly personal.

El-Rufai (2003) insinuates that “corruption is a wide range of social misconducts including fraud, extortion, embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, influence peddling, bestowing of favors to friends and relatives, rigging of elections, abuse of public property, the leaking of official government secret, sales of expired and defective goods like drugs, food, electronics, and spare parts to the public”. Ekiyor (2009), defines corruption as “the unlawful use of official power or influence by an official of the government either to enrich himself or further his course and/ or any other person at the expense of the public, in contravention of his oath of office and/ or contrary to the conventions or laws that are in force”. Corruption is indeed the mother of all crimes and constitute a major hindrance to successive waves of democratization process in Nigeria since 1999. Therefore, efforts should be made by stake holders in our educational sector to inculcate discipline and morality into the students, who are leaders of tomorrow, by ensuring that concepts that advocates for discipline and moral upbringing of students are embedded into the educational curriculum.

At the onset of the fourth republic in Nigeria in May, 1999, it inherited a bureaucratic and political class steeped in corruption from the military rule era who adapted seamless in the new democratic framework instead of seeking to guide and reform it. As such, the high expectations borne out of several factors such as the fact that according to Dunmoye (2003) “Obasanjo was credited as the Head of State who implemented the policies initiated by late Murtala Mohammed (between 1976-1979) that altered the structural, economic, political and social foundation of Nigeria. Democracy in Nigeria has however continued to record high profile scandals such as the 2 billion dollars arms scandal involving Sambo Dasuki, and the Nigerian Airways scandal by

Hadi Siraki: This explains the reason why Nigeria has over the years continued to rank poor in corruption index according to Transparency International. The pervasive looting of state resources has consistently crippled the ability of the government to deliver essential services like education, infrastructure and healthcare.

Democratization Process

In operational term, democratization process in this context refers to the process of moving from authoritarian system characterized by military rule, to democratic political system characterized by civilian rule. Esew (2003), avers that “in Africa, democratization evolves out of the process by which the military and authoritarian regime gradually disengages from governance in order to make way for a popularly elected civilian government by means of a transition program”. Hence, democratization process encompasses all exercises in putting ideal democratic conception into reality. It is an all-encompassing process that must be seen in essence and substance. Therefore, democratization process has to explain how an autochthonous, and ethnocentric process of societal values, ethics, norms and nuance are organized. Muftwang (2003) and Esew (2003) alluded that “democratization process connotes political liberalization of the avenues of decision making”.

When General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over Nigerian government after the demise of General Sani Abacha on June 8, 1989, his main agenda on assumption of office was to transfer power to a civilian democratically elected government. Thus, to realize a transition program, he set up the machinery to conduct an election. In accordance with the program of a smooth journey to a successful transition to civil rule, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was set up to register political parties and organize elections. Three political parties were then registered namely: Alliance for Democracy (AD), The All Peoples Party (APP) and The People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Elections were conducted into the various levels of government.

The fourth republic took off on 29th May, 1999 under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the winner of the presidential election and subsequently the President of Nigeria. On assumption of office, according to New Nigeria, Presidential inaugural speech by President Obasanjo states that “one of the immediate acts of this administration will be to implement quickly and decisively measures that would restore confidence in governance. Such measures will help to create the

auspicious atmosphere necessary for the reforms, the difficult decisions, and the hard work required to put the country back on the path of development and growth” (Obasanjo, 1999).

The agenda of President Obasanjo were hinged on over-hauling the economy and achieving economic stability through due process mechanism, war on corruption, privatization, fiscal and budgetary reforms, debt management and political reform program (Anoshie, 2022). The aforementioned agenda of President Obasanjo appeared to be laudable policies but when it came to implementation, the action of the government appeared to be controversial due to avalanche of corruption that marred the administration. Most of the economic policies from the time of President Obasanjo have not yielded the desired goal or positive results for Nigeria as they were shrouded in mystery and official corruption.

Ideally, elections in democratically oriented political entity provide invaluable opportunities for individuals and, or groups to make inputs with respect to the direction they would want the ruling elite to go in matters affecting overall national development. Burghardt (1967:445) opined that “in societies, accepting a popular franchise, the individual vote directly affects the political process”. Thus, the electoral process presupposes the existence of voters on the one hand and contestants on the other hand. The latter in Nigeria political scene since 1999, however, are more often than not mutually antagonistic. Both the electorates and the contestants are generally conceptualized as working towards a goal (not necessarily a common one) in their different roles, and in understanding of the electoral process. But Lloyd (1971:75) argued that “the goals of any individual are conditioned by the society in which he lives”. Thus, the opportunities which such an individual perceives are those presented by the structure of the society, the values which he holds will be, to some extent at least those common to members of the society.

The electorates, as well as the contestants to political offices see the electoral process in Nigeria since 1999 therefore, as affording opportunities for short and/ or long-term individual and collective advancement in socio- economic and spatial terms. This includes expected enhancement of individuals or groups support for the power elite (godfathers) that ultimately control the disbursement of resources of the State. Spatial differences in such resource allocation give rise to, and perpetuate spatial inequality, which is acknowledged in some geopolitical zones in Nigeria since 1999, when people talk about the existence of dichotomy between regions.

Thus, one major underpinning of this study is a recognition according to Lewis (1965:19), which states that “society is divided both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, in the sense that some groups are marked off from each other by habitation or other division, which cause group solidarity. While horizontal division induce competing geo- political zones to maximize for their respective settlement groups or regions the benefit accruing from the electoral exercise”.

Perhaps, this translates to the ultimate attainment of an upper hand by one group against the other, which engenders spatial inequality in the development process in Nigeria. These vertical and horizontal divisions play their part in the political process.

In the Nigerian context, as witnessed since 1999, those who occupy the apex of the social strata (the power brokers) invariably attempt to manipulate the electoral behavior of those who occupy the lower rungs of the social strata. As such, the power brokers operate in the Nigerian political space, since 1999, in the democratization process. They operationalize a master servant relationship in their dealings with the populace (the masses) in view of the illiteracy and lack of political awareness among the majority of the rural people that constitute the bulk of the electorates. Deliberately, the power brokers denied rural people voters’ education and awareness campaigns, in order to hoodwink their psych from issues of reality to phantasy of sane during electioneering.

Without such power brokers, corrupt practices such as bribery of voters (vote buying and selling) electoral violence and rigging may probably be out of the equation as elements of the political process and electoral process in Nigerian democratization Process. Hunter (1971:145), observed that “in order to keep the discussion of power in operational term, it is necessary to allocate power as resident in the community, and more importantly, still as resident in the men who wield power in the community. So that the physical community becomes dominated by men “who operate within”. In Nigeria since 1999, those who possess an abundance of material resources and/ or intellectual endowment abound. They arbitrarily use them as instruments for influencing public or individual opinions and therefore the electoral behavior of members of a geographic entity. Material resources of import in this context, more often than not implies finance affluence (material wealth) expressed by the possession of disproportionately high disposable cash income, which can be used (illegally) to sway individual or group behavior.

Those who engage in such act may be referred to generally in this work as ‘power brokers’ whose roles have undermined the democratization process in Nigeria since 1999. In essence, the democratic process in Nigeria has been undermined by integrity of democratic institutions by these power brokers. Elections have been marred by rigging, vote-buying and manipulation of result by these politicians. The situation is worsened by the judiciary, a critical institution in the democratization process allegedly been comprised by these manipulators. It can therefore in this context be argued that the inequality and disillusionment by the citizens tend to continue to allow the impunity within the Nigerian democratic process.

Corruption in the political landscape of Nigeria since 1999 to 2023

Anoshie (2022) averred that ‘the experience of the Nigerian political landscape since 1999 to 2023 was characterized by corruption, which includes lack of accountability, coercion, election violence, greed, brazen manipulation, wider scheming, lack of rule of law, lopsided appointment based on ethnic configuration, electoral malpractice (vote buying and selling) voters’ apathy and, absence of rule of law’. In a related manner, Dunmoye (2003) opined that “some of the issues at conflict between the legislature and the executive from 1999 to 2015 include the scrapping of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) by the executive, furniture allowance for members of the National Assembly, interference by the executive in the affairs of National Assembly, issues of credibility over the finance of the legislature, amendment of the electoral Act 2000, the aborted repealing of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Act 2000, and the third term agenda”. The relationship between the legislature and the executive from 1999 to 2015 as showcased above, was not cordial and could be said to be at the deteriorating point at most times, thereby jeopardizing the interest of Nigerians.

This unhealthy political climate culminated into the removal of three Senate Presidents namely Chief Evan Enwerem, Dr. Chuba Okadigbo and Dr. Adolphus Wabara, and equally led to the removal of the speaker of the House of Representatives Alhaji Salisu Buhari. These were followed by the impeachment saga against President Obasanjo by the National Assembly under Ghali Umar Na’ Abba as the speaker of the House of Representatives. Prior to 2019, there were some accusations between the Presidency and the members of the National Assembly of recklessness and corruption.

The National Assembly accused President Obasanjo among other things for using the consolidated revenue fund without appropriations and spending money in excess of appropriations. The uneasy relationship continued and by August, 2002, the House of Representatives gave the President the ultimatum to resign or be impeached. Furthermore, a list of 36 impeachable offences against the President was drawn up. The Senate later joined in the threat of impeachment. This development heated up the political system and threatened the nascent democratic process. Dunmoye (2003) opined that “the impeachment saga was averted through the intervention of some well-meaning Nigerians, including former leaders and traditional rulers”. The above scenario took place before the general elections of 2003. It is worthy of note that most of the issues out of the 36 impeachable offences against the President Obasanjo were cases of corruption.

Going forward into the second term of President Obasanjo administration from 2003 to 2007, Nigeria drifted into poverty with increased violence particular in the Niger Delta region. Nothing was done to remedy the situations by President Obasanjo regime. As President Yar’ Adua took over after winning the 2007 presidential general elections, the drama changed. Under President Yar’ Adua’s watch, the relationship between the legislature and the executive improved significantly, because of the president’s resolve to implement wide range political and economic reforms. Firstly, he acknowledged that the process that enthroned him as president was marred by corruption.

Sadly, President Yar’ Adua could not live to carry out his proposed reforms. President Goodluck Jonathan assumed office in 2010, following the demise of his boss President Yar’ Adua. Under President Jonathan’s watch, according to Sadiq and Abdullahi (2013), “contentious issues in the relationship between the Executive and the Legislative arms of government include budgetary allocation, allegations of corruption, and the award of zero allocation to Security and Exchange Commission”. Thus notably, for the first time in the political history of Nigeria, under President Jonathan administration, the President delegated his finance minister to present the 2014 budget to the National Assembly on his behalf, and such undermined due process.

As President Buhari took over governance in 2015, the Buhari administration witnessed unhealthy relationship between the legislature and the executive in his first tenure. Such squabble between the two arms of government led to defection from All Progressive Congress (APC) the

ruling party to the People's Democratic Party the opposition party by the Senate President Dr. Bukola Saraki. The interest of Nigerians was compromised at the expense of political interest of the politicians in this direction. However, the drama changed drastically in the second tenure of office of President Buhari. The National Assembly under the watch of Senate President Lawal and Speaker Gbajabiamila became a rubber stamp chambers and stooge to the executive. Corruption became a norm and rule of law was cast into oblivion. There was no check and balance.

The situation became more worrisome that President Buhari under the influence of the attorney general of the federation declined to honor invitations by the legislature for clarification on matters that concern the corporate existence of the nation and corruption inherently visible in his administration. The National Assembly was seen in many instances acting the script of the executive by playing to the gallery. The National Assembly accepted and passed every executive bill line, hook and sinker without questioning. Corruption was obviously and glaringly witnessed to the extent that the Chief Judge of the Federation Walter Onnoghen was ousted on a trump up charge.

Fighting Corruption

The advents of democracy in 1999 brought about urgent need to address corruption in the country. As estimates suggested that the country lost over 400 billion dollars to corruption from 1960 to 1999. This was in the face of Nigeria's dependence on oil weak institutions and poor management culture (Igiebor, 2019). In order to tackle this trend, Nigeria has employed several approaches to tackle corruption since 1999. The establishment of the anti-corruption agencies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) were largely celebrated as steps in the right direction (Raimi et al., 2013). These agencies were tasked with investigating and prosecuting corruption cases concerning money laundering and embezzlement (Adeniran, 2019). The efforts of these agencies led to the convictions of former Governor of Abia State, Orji Uzor Kalu, former Delta State Governor, James Ibori to mention but a few. Over the years however, these bodies are being increasingly criticized for their selective prosecution and political bias.

Unarguably, the legal framework aimed at addressing corruption in Nigeria continues to lack adequate enforcement mechanisms. Nevertheless, between 2015 and 2018, the EFCC secured 603 convictions (Fisayo et al., 2023). Successive government since the Obasanjo's administration have rather paid lip service to anti-corruption campaigns. Obasanjo government employed fight against corruption as a tool for targeting political opponents, rather than tackling the endemic corruption bedeviling the country. Several notable corruption incidences have occurred under Obasanjo's watch without any meaningful punitive measures implemented on such individuals such as Willy Obiano and Hadi Sirika.

According to Alozie (2024), judicial independence, poverty, and political will have significantly impacted the fight against corruption. Report by Centre for Democracy and Development in 2022 establishes that 63% of Nigerians see bribery as survival tactics rather than a crime (Okuwada, 2023). A clear indication of the level of corruption that plagues the country. The educational system should urgently address this imbalance of Nigerians negative psych, through inculcating ethics and value as re-orientation program in school curriculum.

Corruption and Tenure Elongation Sage

According to Anoshie (2022) "in attempt to perpetuate himself in power, President Obasanjo secretly initiated the political reform agenda that was set to add more time (third term) to elected officers including the president and governors". This term agenda had set the legislative and executive at each other's throat. President Obasanjo was bent to continue in office beyond the 2007 date prescribed by the Constitution, he quickly, organized a Constitution and Political Conference in 2005 and nominated about one third of its members single handedly. Anoshie (2022) further alluded that "the CONFAB as the group was addressed, was charged to revise the 1999 Constitution and suggest possible changes to be considered by the National Assembly. It was alleged that President Obasanjo's representatives sneaked into the Conference copies of a revised version of the 1999 Constitution proposing for third term or six year single tenure for elected public officials".

Furthermore, Anoshie (2022) argued that "even though President Obasanjo denied involvement in the issue, it became obvious that a hidden agenda was on course. The third term bid was magnanimously rejected by the Senate and the House of Representatives on Tuesday, 25th May,

2006”. To further elucidate corruption inherent in Nigeria political scene in the democratization process in Nigeria since 1999, President Goodluck Jonathan equally advocated for a six year single term for president and State Governors. This was greeted with vehement opposition, as the move was not supported by the majority of the Nigerian people.

Corruption cases in the Nigerian General Elections: 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023.

A general look at the civilian rule reveals that election in Nigerian democratization process since 1999 till date, is not yet a game of the electorates, rather a game of the government in power, with the Federal might. Power resides with the government and not the people.

Mahmud (2005), notes that “the Federal Government in collaboration with other agencies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Police and other sister agencies determine who wins, where and how”. The leadership went ahead and described the 2003 general election as “the worst in the country and called it 419 election”. Obviously election rigging is a notorious fact both in its incidence and in form it takes. It constitutes the most serious problem confronting democratization process in Nigeria.

By its very nature, election rigging, particularly of the massive kind alleged to have been perpetrated during the 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections, is subversive of the Constitution and of the democratic form of government. To buttress the point Wole (2003), states that “the general elections of 2003 was a robbery of the right of the people to participate in their own government or in Wole Soyinka’ s more telling metaphor “the stealing, the thief of their voices”. It is therefore the greatest offence of corruption committed against the Constitution and people of Nigeria. In the light of the above, it would be difficult to expect a sustainable democratization process or agenda of governance to emerge from deeply fraudulent electoral process such as elections we witnessed in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. A corrupt process will invariably, impact negatively on performance. Little wonder then, there was no respect for rule of law by the so called elected officials, and no justice to the citizens, no accountability and transparency.

Perhaps, where there is a wishful attempt to corrupt the process through acts of coercion and fraud or an equally damaging situation of gross administrative incompetence, or both, it is wishful thinking at best to expect a sustainable democratization process or democratic agenda to emerge. For instance, the privatization policy was a program for the Nigerian financial elite. The majority of contracts awarded during the time under review were not implemented in spite of the due process.

A closer look at the poor handling of electricity project starting from Obasanjo regime, reveals that the National Assembly was forced to institute a probe panel, which indicted many party stalwarts including late Chief Bola Ige, and Senator Iyabo Obasanjo among others. Yet the government did not take any action to bring those convicted to book.

The anti- corruption crusade is believed to be targeted at those who fell out of government favor. The anti- corruption crusade tenaciously ignored the request to investigate alleged scam within the presidency. The privatization project was believed to be a portal for official thriving. Mahmud (2005) notes that “the former head of the project and then minister of FCT under Obasanjo, Nasir El-Rufai was in 2005, indicted by the Senate for corruption dealing, while handling the pet project. The Senate suggested that he should be banned from holding public office for forty years”. But within a space of time, he became the governor of Kaduna State, without the government enforcing any action against him.

Under President Jonathan administration, Halliburton scandal, the fuel subsidy fund scandal, the Police Pension Fund Scam, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) misappropriation of funds cases marred the democratization process in Nigeria. Jonathan (2011), reveals that during the 51st Independence Anniversary Lecture in Abuja, President Jonathan admitted that “the system has collapsed because it encourages the culture of corruption, patronage and indiscipline, but he did not say specifically, what steps he was taking to improve the situation”.

The scandals inherent in President Buhari administration was unprecedented in Nigerian political history, as all manner of corruption stories were heard concerning atrocities in the administration, ranging from python swallowing huge amounts of naira to cutting of grass with billions of naira among others. Top government officials of Buhari administration were indicted

for corruption. For instance, the former Chief of Staff to the Buhari administration and the former EFCC boss among others were found wanting.

None of the administration under review has done anything meaningful to revamp the educational sector. Year in, year out, the crisis in educational sector deepened with teachers and lectures embarking on strike. Very little effort was seen in terms of real investment in education, except in few states. The 25% budgetary allocation to education earmarked for the developing countries was yet to be implemented.

Conclusion

Corruption has become a torn in the flesh of successive democratization process and administrations in Nigeria since 1999 till date. All the federal budgets from 1999 till date were misapplied and partly misappropriated. This malfeasance formed the basic rationale for impeachment processes initiated by National Assembly. The presidency's gross interference now and then in the leadership and working of the National Assembly resulting to countless stand offs and the removal of three Presidents of the Senate and two Speakers of the House of Representatives, and cross carpeting of the President of the Senate from APC to PDP.

The batch of woeful judgment arising from general elections held in Nigeria from 1999 till date had destroyed whatever sympathy the judiciary has with the public. The way and manner the judiciary handled election petition since 1999 dashed the hopes of the common man.

Recommendations

It is obvious from the analytical review that the most decisive issue in Nigeria today is the myths and prospects of a smooth democratization process devoid of corruption. Corruption should be tackled through re-orientation and patriotism. Our educational curriculum should enshrine ethics and value from Primary to higher institution. Our judiciary should operate optimally without fear or favor. Strong institutions should be in place against strong individuals.

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