

Review Article

# Reviewing The Nexus Between Sociopolitical Structure And Corruption In Nigeria

Ogochukwu Favour Nzeakor<sup>1</sup>, Chibuikwe Ndubuisi Nwoke<sup>2</sup>, Nnamdi Green Nwoha<sup>3</sup>, Thank God Ikenegbu<sup>4</sup>, Obinna Ugwu<sup>5</sup>, Osinachi Peter Uba-Uzoagwa<sup>6</sup> & Ikemenfuna Nwoke<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1&3</sup>Peace & Conflict Studies Unit, School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Abia State, Nigeria,

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology & Anthropology, the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria,

<sup>4</sup>Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria

<sup>5&6</sup>Social Science Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria

<sup>7</sup> Department of Political Sciences, the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria.

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**Abstract** - Given that most intellectual interventions on the nature of corruption in Nigeria have focused more on the analysis of individual, cultural, and economic factors; the focus of the present work is on the nexus between corruption and sociopolitical structures in Nigeria. The discussion was guided by three leading questions including: what is the sociopolitical origin of corruption in Nigeria? What are the sociopolitical institutions that promote corruption in Nigeria? And how have the sociopolitical structures promoted corruption in Nigeria? I therefore argue as follows: that corruption in Nigeria originated from weak and lopsided sociopolitical structures that were orchestrated by colonization and neocolonialism; that such institutions like lopsided sociopolitical zoning, state and local government creation, weak and ambiguous legal system, unjustifiable security vote for governors and president, and State Joint Local Government Account System are all implicated in the promotion of corruption in Nigeria; these structures disproportionately put resources in the disposal of a section of the country; and that these structures have promoted corruption in Nigeria through promotion of structural nepotism, mediocrity, neglect, marginalization, and subjugation. The systemic nepotism, in itself, promotes opportunity for corruption by providing little or no surveillance on people in positions of authorities.

**Keyword** - Corruption, lopsidedness, sociopolitical structure, weak institutions, weak protocol theory

## I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption, defined as the abuse of public office, or entrusted power for private gain, is now one of the most sophisticated, and systemic social problems in the world today- affecting both developing and developed countries negatively (Ear-

Dupuy & Serrat, 2014; Lambsdorff, 2007; Transparency international, 2018). In this sense, no nation in the world is completely insulated from scourge of corruption. This is because even those countries like Denmark, Finland, New Zealand and others who ranked lower in the CPI ranking, still scored a minimum of 87 in the index. However, statistics from the ranking shows that corruption is more of the problem of developing nations, especially in Africa. For instance, in the recent report on corruption perception index released by Transparency International, no African country was found within the first and second quartiles in the 2019 ranking (Transparency international, 2019).

In fact, it was only eight out of 49 countries in Africa (16%) scored more than 43 out of 100 on the index despite different policies and commitments from African leaders towards reducing the continent's corruption incidence. Taking the analysis further, the very least corrupt country in Africa, Seychelles, scored 66 out of 100. Seychelles is followed by Botswana and Cabo Verde, with scores of 61 and 57 respectively. At the very bottom of the index for the seventh year in a row, Somalia scores 10 points, followed by South Sudan (13) to round out the lowest scores in the region. With an average score of just 32, Sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest scoring region on the index, followed closely by Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with an average score of 35 (Transparency International, 2018, 2019 & 2020).

The negative consequences of corruption are simply unbearable; and of course, expected to be more devastating amongst African countries. For instance, Africa, despite being one of the continents mostly endowed with all manner of natural resources, still houses most poverty stricken countries in the world- with unfavourable socio-economic indices: massive and pervasive poverty, double-digit



inflation, unemployment, dwindling foreign exchange receipts, poor GDP growth rates, high infant and maternal mortality, high levels of illiteracy, and millions of school-age children out of school. In fact, most of the countries are among the highest loan and grant applicants in the world (Bello, 2017).

Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning at this point that most intellectual interventions regarding the nature of corruption in Nigeria have focused more on the analysis of individual, cultural, and economic factors; with little efforts towards reviewing the socio-political factors (see Adeniran, 2019; Bello, 2017; Ezeh, 2017, Kouassi, 2016; Page, 2018). For instance, Adeniran (2019) posited that though greed has been noted as a major precipitator of grand corruption in Nigeria, especially among influential private and public actors, festering poverty, soaring unemployment and absolute lack of social support and social protection programs have been equally adjudged as motivators of petty corruption among majority of poor Nigerians who have to subsist on meager incomes. Again, Page (2018) only ended up categorizing corruption in Nigeria without any effort in explaining the underlying factors.

#### **A. Study Focus**

The focus of the present work is therefore to review the connection between the sociopolitical structures and corruption in Nigeria. The leading questions are:

- (1) What is the sociopolitical origin of corruption in Nigeria?
- (2) What are the sociopolitical institutions that promote corruption in Nigeria?
- (3) How have the sociopolitical structures emboldened or promoted corruption?

## **II. DISCUSSION**

#### **A. What is the sociopolitical origin of corruption in Nigeria?**

It is noteworthy that colonialism, as a system, was fueled by capitalism which was embedded on desperate personal profit maximization. This is to say that colonialism as a system was corruptive in itself. It was fueled by desire to maximize personal or national gains by all means. Colonization was created as an economic or capitalist policy to grab more land when land was the mainstay of the economy. So, every activity and process undertaking in the colonies was done to maximize the selfish gains of the colonial masters. This objective guided every other structures, systems and institution established during this era. The systems and institutions were contrived in order to benefit the colonial masters. Even when the Colonial masters reluctantly allowed self-rules in these colonies, the system was still run to guarantee their selfish gains at the detriments of the Colonies- this is what was dubbed as neocolonialism (Adebola, 2006; Bello, 2017).

As a matter of corollary, the desire to accumulate private gains (i.e. capitalism) culminated in colonialism. When colonialism went out of fashion due to change in economic structure; then machine (and not land any longer) was then the mainstay of the world economy, the colonial masters fashioned a weak sociopolitical structure that would still guarantee their selfish interest. This led the foundation of weak rules and frail institutions/systems which have deteriorated over the years to culminate in the phenomenal incidence of corruption as being experienced in Nigeria today (Rodney, 1973; Historical Context, 2012). Corruption in Nigeria was therefore an offshoot of weak, lopsided, and ambiguous sociopolitical structures ushered in by colonization and poor de-colonization process.

This position was supported by other scholars like Kouassi (2016), Ezeh (2017) and others. For instance, Kouassi (2016) holds that there is a strong correlation between corruption and capitalism which was a by-product of colonialism and imperialism in modern Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular. In the same token, Ezeh (2017) opines that corruption, and indeed other forms of anti-social behavior in Africa, reflects stunted, incomplete, and weak de- colonization process in Nigeria. Consequently, every gamut of Nigerian socioeconomic and political system is a reflection of weakened sociopolitical institutions that breed corruption.

#### **B. What are the weak sociopolitical institutions/structures that promote corruption in Nigeria?**

##### **a) Lopsided sociopolitical zoning**

As stated above, in order to elongate the socioeconomic control of the former colonies through some 'unwholesome means' for their selfish ends, the colonial masters facilitated all manners of weak socio-political and economic institutions through instrumentality of neocolonialism. Having test-run two systems of rules- direct and indirect rules- and weighed their usefulness in terms of their selfish end; they further facilitated its kind by splitting southern part of Nigeria into regions: Eastern, Western, and much later Midwestern region; while the North remained one indivisible entity.

When it appeared that their selfish and sectional ends were being threatened during the secession era immediately after the Independence (1967 - 1970), the colonial masters through the instrumentality of neocolonialism, facilitated further splitting of the regions into states and local councils with all manners of lopsided and dishonest features for their selfish and sectional gains. This explains why there are total of 19 states in the North and 17 in the whole of Southern Nigeria with other corruptive implications on other structures like the military, police, legislature, judiciary, fiscal allocation, and other primordial quota systems not the least federal character principle and education quota. In order to put up some fraudulent justification to this; all manners of unscrupulous and dishonest census figures have been put forward. As I

write now, Nigeria is yet to have another census for the last 19 years- just to make allowance for further sectional and selfish gains.

In fact, all other socioeconomic and political structures in Nigeria are replete with weakness and lopsidedness. For example, while Kano State (in the North) with the current population of about 4 million people has 44 local government areas; Lagos State with far greater population of 14 million has only 20 local government areas (LGAs) (Lagos, Nigeria Population, 2017-2021; Kano, Nigeria Population, 2017-2021). When compared with Eastern part of Nigeria, LGAs in Kano State alone are almost the same size in 3 states (Abia, Ebonyi, and Enugu) in the Eastern Nigeria put together. On the whole, Northern part of Nigeria houses 54% of the total LGAs in Nigeria (N = 419); 53% (N = 58) of the Senatorial seats; and 53% (N = 191) House of Representative seats (Olawale 2019; Falae 2018).

It is glaring from the above analysis that the sociopolitical structures are weak, lopsided, and tend to allow individuals from the northern part more access to power and resources that can be abused.

#### ***b) Weak legal system and corruption in Nigeria***

Apart from the weak and 'corruptive' sociopolitical structures; the imperialists and their local allies, also facilitated weak, ambiguous and vague legal structures that have contributed immensely to the convoluted corruption incidence in Nigeria. Taking Nigeria legal system for instance, pundits have put forward the inherent weaknesses as follows: It is strewn with ambiguous statutes, military governance concepts, over centralization of governance, protection of special interests, unscrupulously subjugating and discrimination of the minority groups for selfish gains of the majority groups, more military in design/nature, ineffective for democratic governance, promotion of excessive powers of the executive, and encouragement of loop holes and statutes that promote an unduly powerful central government, special interests, religious sentiments, extremism, and above all excessive corruption (Diminas, 2013; Ausa, 2018).

#### ***c) Security votes and Corruption in Nigeria***

Security vote for the executive arm of the government was introduced in Nigeria during the military regime of former Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida (1985 - 1993). It is a monthly allowance allocated to the 36 states, aimed at funding security services within such states. The monthly fund runs into billions of naira and varies based on the level of security required by the individual state (Sani, 2019).

#### ***d) State Joint Local Government Account System (SJLGAS)***

This sociopolitical structure makes it mandatory for a state and the constituent councils/local government areas to have joint allocation account. Though the monthly allocation

would drop in the local government bank account, but the state governor would mandate the local government boss to withdraw the money and remit it cash to the state a third party designated for such corruptive arrangement (Agbani & Ugwoke, 2014).

#### ***C. How have the weak/lopsided sociopolitical structures in Nigeria emboldened corruption?***

##### ***a) Through promotion of structural nepotism, mediocrity, neglect, marginalization, and subjugation***

One of the palpable ways in which the lopsided structures embolden corruption in Nigeria is through promotion of structural nepotism, mediocrity, neglect, marginalization, and subjugation. Structural nepotism, in itself, promotes opportunity for corruption by providing little or no surveillance on people in positions of authorities. For instance, the current federal government of Nigeria appoints virtually all the security chiefs and heads of sensitive parastatals and departments from the northern part of the country; just as it has used the machinery of the government to promote structural marginalization unabatedly. This phenomenon has elicited a lot of reactions from the citizenry not the least protests, litigations, etc.

For instance, a group of 16 citizens from marginalized Southern Nigeria have instituted a legal action against the president of Nigeria. As reported by Nnochiri in the Vanguard news of Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2020:

The plaintiffs are praying the court to among other things, determine whether it was not "reckless and adverse to the interest of Nigeria", for President Buhari to obtain a loan facility from the Islamic Development Bank, African Development Bank, the World Bank, China, Japan, and Germany amounting to \$22.7 billion (USD), for infrastructural development, only to allocate the bulk of the fund to the Northern region. They are seeking a declaration that the loan facility purportedly for infrastructural development wherein less than 1% of the amount is to be allocated to the South East Zone of Nigeria for specific infrastructural development, violates section 16 (1) (a) (b) and S16 (2) (a) (b) (c) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended)... Whether the power to appoint designated public officers including permanent secretaries, principal representatives of Nigeria abroad, which is vested in the 1st Defendant has been lawfully exercised by him since the inception of his administration from 2015 till date and Whether his actions are in breach of Sections 171(5), 814(3) (4) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). "Whether the power to appoint Nigeria's Armed Services Chiefs, other Commanders or top officials of the respective Armed Forces Higher and High Commands' General Staff ; namely the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) and Chief of Airforce Staff (CA8); the other statutorily established Nigerian National Security agencies or services , namely: The Inspector General of the Nigerian Police (IGP), the Directors General (DGs) of

the State Security Service (SSS), National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA); the Heads of National Security Associated Federal Government (FG) establishments, namely the Nigerian Civil Defense and Security Corps (NCDSC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Nigerian Customs and Excise Service, the Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS), the Nigerian Correctional Services (NCS), the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the National Security Adviser (NSA), the Ministers of Defense, Interior, Police and the respective National Security ministries' Permanent Secretaries' which is vested in the 1st Defendant, has been lawfully exercised by the 1st Defendant since the inception of his administration and whether these appointments are in compliance with 81(2), 814(3)(4), 8217(3) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) (Nnochiri, 2020).

This, among other negative consequences, has emboldened corruption in Nigeria by promoting motivations and opportunities that make corruption possible. In this sense, the lopsided structures weaken the rules/laws; the weakened rules then provide the necessary motivations and opportunities for people in the position of authority to utilize such positions for private and sectional gains. A case in point was the discharging and reinstating of a corrupt police officer who ordered the shooting of six spare-parts sellers in Abuja in August 2005 for frustrating the love advances he made to one of their girls' friends in a night club. Instead of facing the full wrath of the law, the culprit was reinstated to his position and rewarded handsomely. Among the possible reasons for this corruptive act is that Mr. Danjuma (the perpetrator) and the Attorney General of the federation are from the same part of the country, as captured by Onyeji (2020).

While they were making efforts towards appealing the case, the police confirmed to PREMIUM TIMES that Mr. Danjuma had been reinstated into the force. It said the reinstatement was approved by the Police Service Commission which relied on the judgment of the court that freed him after finding him not culpable. Mr. Danjuma's rank was restored, his accumulated salaries from June 2005, were also paid with plans to send him on a refresher course, a police memo published by Sahara Reporters showed. In December of that year, he received double promotion. From the rank of Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), he was promoted to Commissioner of Police and then to Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG), according to a Daily Trust report. The families see this as the height of injustice. All moves made towards appealing the ruling were reportedly frustrated by the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF), Abubakar Malami.

Another case, in this regard, was shielding corrupt soldiers who connived with a kidnapper to kill police officers that

arrested a kidnaper for the singular reason that the soldiers are from the northern part of Nigeria where the current president as well as most security heads hail from as captured by Iriekpen (2020):

Wadume was on the wanted list of the Nigeria Police for kidnapping in Taraba and neighbouring states for a long time. He was specifically wanted for killing his victim, Usman Garba, after receiving N106.3million as ransom. He was assisted to escape from the custody of the Intelligence Response Team (IRT) by soldiers attached to Battalion 93, Takum. The soldiers also attacked the police team conveying the kidnap kingpin to the Taraba State police headquarters in Jalingo on August 6, 2019. They were killed by the soldiers along Ibi-Jalingo road in Taraba State, on Tuesday, August 6, 2019 after they had succeeded in arresting Wadume, an alleged kidnap kingpin who was on their wanted persons' list for months. He was reportedly rescued after the soldiers had gunned down the cops... To worsen his case, Capt Balarabe in his statement to the joint investigation panel set up by the Chief of Defence Staff admitted that Wadume was his friend, noting that the alleged kingpin once gave him fish worth N50,000. Balarabe also said that Wadume gave him N200,000 to repair a patrol van which was having mechanical problems. Balarabe disclosed that he asked the DCO to switch off his phone to prevent the military police from reaching him... They even wondered how the AGF wants to successfully prosecute Wadume without the soldiers and policemen who aided and abetted him in the crime, especially when they are all tide to the evidence before the court. This is why like many issues in Nigeria, observers imputing ethnic dimensions to the case with many attributing the delay in prosecuting Captain Balarabe to the fact it is because he is from a certain section of the country. They wondered if he was a southerner if it would have been difficult to prosecute him the same way it is now? They believe that anti-social and heinous crimes occur and prevail because after the initial noise, everything dies down, lacking diligent follow up to ensure a satisfactorily punitive, deterrent and rehabilitative final resolution.

Another instantiation of sociopolitical induced corruption in Nigeria is captured in Jim Yong Kim's report. In his report, World Bank president, Jim Yong Kim, reported that the president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari asked them to focus on northern Nigeria. It was captured in his report thus:

You know, in my very first meeting with President Buhari he said specifically that he would like us to shift our focus to the northern region of Nigeria and we've done that. Now, it has been very difficult (Abioye, 2017).

There are other plethora of instantiation of the link between lopsided sociopolitical structures, weak rules/protocols and corruption in Nigeria where lopsided structures have aided corruption by weakening the rules that

have consequently created opportunities and motivation for corruption in Nigeria. Meanwhile, the point being made is this: corruption thrives in Nigeria because individuals enjoying these excess powers and resources in their possessions due to little or no surveillance arising from structural nepotism, and such individuals tend to utilize such powers for sectional and selfish gains. This is in line with Achebe (1983) conclusion: "Nigerians are corrupt today because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profit".

**b) Constitutional flaws and corruption in Nigeria**

The obvious weaknesses, like ambiguous statute, inherent in Nigerian constitution, as elucidated above, have been utilized by people in the position of authority for their selfish or sectional gains. Take for instance the ambiguity in the educational qualification for seeking election into the office of the president of the country; as provided by the Section "131" of 1999 Constitution which provides that:

A person shall be qualified for election to the office of President if- (d)he has been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent.

The public opinion has it that such weak/ambiguous section of the Constitution, as the above, gave rise to the recent widely held opinion that the judgment delivered by the Supreme Court of Nigeria that held that "the current president of Nigeria, Buhari, who was enmeshed in certificate scandals, is eminently qualified" is corruptive- especially giving the unscrupulous manner the then Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Onoghen, was removed from office few weeks before the election. The Supreme Court Justices were therefore accused of possibly manipulating the weakness in its judgment. In the said judgment, the Supreme Court held that:

by virtue of the provisions of the Constitution, a candidate who possesses a primary school certificate and has worked in the public or private service for a period not less than 10 years, and can read, write and communicate in the English language to the satisfaction of INEC is qualified to contest [Nigerian Supreme Court of Justice].

They further held that: the Nigerian Constitution only required a candidate contesting the presidential election to be educated up to secondary education even when the candidate does not possess the certificate [Nigerian Supreme Court of Justice].

As garnered from the above, the grand norm/constitutional provisions are weak, vague and amenable to manipulation. In this sense, it creates opportunities (lacking effective surveillance) and motivations (appropriate deterrence) necessary for corruption to thrive. This culminates in it being

manipulated by the privileged class and social entrepreneurs for their personal and sectional gains.

**c) Security vote and corruption in Nigeria**

Pundits are of the opinion that security vote is one of the most potent promoter of corruption in Nigeria. For instance, the immediate past Nigerian Chief of Army Staff, Mr. Tukur Buratai, citing, Robert Clark, said the use of security votes by executives is unconstitutional. He averred that many governors take advantage of their immunity cover from prosecution which prevents them from being checked until they leave the office, to embezzle and misappropriate the funds. Furthermore, security votes being transacted mostly in cash, is not subject to legislative oversight or independent audit because of its pretentious sensitive nature. The monthly fund now runs into billions of naira and varies based on the level of security required by the individual state. In fact, it was reported that about 29 states in Nigeria spent an average of \$580 million (N208.8 billion) yearly on security votes (Transparency International, 2018).

Information from other secondary sources, revealed how the weaknesses in the rules are being utilized for personal gains with respect to security vote. Kunle Sanni reported on Premium times how the immediate past governor of Abia State, Mr. T. A. Orji withdrew N500 million Naira monthly from the security vote during his years as governor of Abia State. This is in addition to other several billions both in local and foreign currencies stashed out in different locations (Sani, 2019).

**D. Conclusion**

The focus of the present work is on the nexus between corruption and sociopolitical structures in Nigeria. The discussion was guided by three leading questions including: what is the sociopolitical origin of corruption in Nigeria? What are the sociopolitical institutions that promote corruption in Nigeria? And how have the sociopolitical structures emboldened or promoted corruption in Nigeria?

On the sociopolitical origin of corruption in Nigeria, I argue that corruption in Nigeria originated from weak and lopsided sociopolitical structures that were orchestrated by colonization and imperialism. On the weak sociopolitical institutions that promoted corruption, I contend that such institutions like lopsided sociopolitical zoning, state and local government creation, weak and ambiguous legal system, unjustifiable security vote for governors and president, and State Joint Local Government Account System are all implicated. These structures disproportionately put resources in the possession of a section of the country. Finally, I argue that these structures have promoted corruption in Nigeria through promotion of structural nepotism, mediocrity, neglect, marginalization, and subjugation. The systemic nepotism, in itself, promotes opportunity for corruption by providing little or no surveillance on people in positions of authorities. What is

more, the ambiguous and frail legal system has been manipulated and utilized by people in the position of authority for their selfish or sectional gains; just as the security votes being transacted mostly in cash, is not subject to legislative oversight or independent audit because of its pretentious sensitive nature.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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