

Influence of Corruption on Nation Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

Corruption is present in all parts of the world, irrespective of geographical location, economic status, or level of state development. However, corruption is dominant in some countries when compared to others, hence, this study focuses on the nature of corruption in Nigeria which due to its dominant structure affects all facets and sectors of human and state activities in the country. To provide a deepened knowledge of the effect of corruption in Nigeria, the study focuses mostly on the influence of corruption mostly conducted by elites on Nigeria's nation-building processes, and how Nigeria continues to suffer in its attempt to establish a healthy nation-building process due to the huge presence of corruption in the country. Finally, the study focuses on the Nigerian state from 1999 (the beginning of the 4th republic) to 2021.

Keywords: Corruption, Elites, Nation-building, unemployment, poverty, Nigeria, democracy.

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1. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research methodology style where an expansive discussion of corruption and its influence on nation-building is provided and discussed. Additionally, since the study seeks to understand how corruption affects Nigerian society, a case-study exploratory research design is provided. Therefore, this provides a deepened knowledge of Nigeria socio-political as well as the economic system and how corruption continues to deter efficient nation-building processes.

Accordingly, the primary data of the study is drawn from extensive usage of available literature concerning corruption in Nigeria and by explaining the ways through which nation-building might be affected by corrupt practices. An intense discussion of the concept of corruption in Nigeria by Fakanbi and Ijisaki was inherently important in the compilation of this study. Similarly, international discussion of the concept of corruption from Transparency International and World Bank signified another important primary data source to this project.

Additionally, the discussion of political corruption in Nigeria by Ogundiya also formulated a vital source of data for us as it made us understand the implications of corruption in Nigeria and explain why Nigeria's nation-building process is continually dampened by smears of corruption. Finally, based on the framework of the author's literature contribution, the study continues to highlight why Nigeria continues to suffer various limitations to healthy and peaceful nation-building which is mostly a product of the level of corruption in the country.

2. Corruption and its dominance in Nigeria.

Corruption manifests itself in various forms in Nigerian society and this has created a wide range of socio-economic problems for the country. Problems ranging from high levels of poverty, deficient public spending, domestic political and ethnic clashes, unemployment, amongst others all have their roots tied to corruption in Nigeria. While it could be argued that corruption affects all nations as mentioned by Wells and Hymes (2012, p. 44), the Nigerian society faces an interesting level of corruption which ranks it as one of the most corrupt countries in Africa according to Transparency International (2020).

As a result of the universality of corruption, what corruption means in Nigeria might be different from what people in other societies might consider corruption to be. However, Agatiello (2010, p. 1461) provides a more inclusive definition of corruption where it is defined as "a commission or omission of an action, an abuse of trust, or vice which ultimately changes the legal as well as the ethical obligations of a public function to the pursuit of the private objective of political, social, or economic benefits". We can then deduce from the above definition that corruption is practised in the hope of gaining ill wealth or achieving a goal through illegal means, however, sacrificing public good for an individual benefit. Concerning this study, the public good that is being sacrificed for private selfish gains is nation-building.

As mentioned by Gambari (2008, p. 3), the ancient political entity known as an empire is in today's world replaced by nations or nation-states. Therefore, as various elements are needed to build, maintain, and sustain an empire, in the same way, building and maintaining a nation requires various elements and processes. The process of building a nation is what is directly transferred to mean nation-building.

Almond, et al., (2014, p. 128), in their definition of nation-building outlines it to mean a process through

which the loyalties, commitment and political expectations of persons belonging to various disintegrated ethnic groups are transferred to a larger central political unit. For this reason, to increase individuals' support and acceptance to building a nation, Smith (1991, p. 68) posits that nation-building seeks to target people's values, beliefs, and thought processes towards accepting the central political unit.

A similar submission was provided by Karl and William (1966, p. 102), viewing nation-building as a structure of a single national identity created by the usage of a single national identity, hence influencing state action. As expected, mostly the elites and influential members of the society can influence the state apparatus, therefore, these elites may in some instances use the state in reaching their selfish gains. This is similar to what is obtainable in Nigeria, where the elite members of the society continue to indulge in corrupt practices that are harmful to nation-building, state growth and development. According to Carolyn (2005), in ensuring healthy nation-building processes, state apparatuses should entail looking to satisfy the general needs of the public to increase their interest and trust in the central political authority, unfortunately, this is lacking in most parts of the world.

This argument was supported by Onuoha & Ugwueze (2014, p. 48), viewing nation-building as a purposeful process to achieving political stability, security and state legitimacy. An intrinsic outlook to nation-building was provided by Alesina & Rich (2005), categorizing citizen's influence to developing nation-building tendencies as an innate value which transforms from being just a belief into a norm or even into law, which is similar to the idea of imagined communities postulated by Benedict Anderson (1983, p. 67). Hence, it is understood that nation-building exerts a strong influence on the state's economic, political, judicial, and social sectors.

Concerning the theoretical framework of our study which is based on elite theory, Hoefte & Veenendal (2019, p. 179) suggests that a bulk of nation-building processes is dependent on the influential members of the society. This is because these influential societal members have easier access to capital, labour, legislative decisions and even mass supporters than non-elite members of the society. Should the elites provide efficient nation-building policies, then other members of the society develop a greater affinity to believing in the central nation.

There are different discussions of elitism in the literature but this study focuses on the elite theory discussion of Gaetano Mosca. Mosca (1939, p. 34) provides a discussion of the ruling class where it is seen that every society is divided into two; the rulers and the ruled. The class that rules are usually lesser in number when compared to the rule, hence, the members of the ruling class are usually very organized, providing policies that will ensure their longevity in power. Hence, we can see a formation of an organized minority over a disorganized majority.

To consolidate power, the minority ruling class in most cases may act according to their interest. Therefore, it is common to find undemocratic tendencies in elitist societies, since the aim is to ensure the continuance of the elite. For this reason, elements such as corruption, inequality, political instability, and weak state infrastructures are common in elitist societies. According to Michels (1965, p. 68), the iron law of oligarchy is maintained by the elites since state power is contained amongst very few members of the society. In such instances, the majority who are ruled loses faith in nation-building, therefore, forming sub-identities or even secessionist tendencies.

In oligarchic societies, illiberal models of democracy are recorded. At most, these societies are regarded as quasi-democracies, exhibiting elements of a healthy democracy, however, deeply rooted in illiberal values. Since power is vested in the hands of a few elites, communication and teamwork which is one major element of nation-building is missing, therefore, leading to poor nation-building structures. Similarly, in societies where the goal of the elite is only to enrich their pockets, it becomes impossible to achieve any meaningful nation-building goal as the leaders are minimally interested in the public society.

For Hofte & Veenendal (2019, p. 181), elites are the most important members of the society in issues of nation-building due to their influence. Elite organize state functions, state remembrance events, pass laws, initiate public directives, organize a public budget and are actively involved in public spending. Similarly, they influence the education, history and cultural values of the nation, placing them as the most valuable members of the society. Additionally, due to their prime position in politics and social life, people look to them and accord them charismatic values, for such reasons, a majority of ordinary citizens would do as directed or as they have seen the elites act.

Regarding the Nigerian discussion of elite influence in nation-building, Eliagwu (1985, p.14) highlights that the majority are coerced or lured into accepting the policies provided by the elites in issues relating to nation-building. This further adds volume to our argument that elites do play a huge role in nation-building. According to Calhoun (1993, p. 224), nation-building can be used negatively to destabilize the democratic process; this explains why post-colonial states experience dominant party systems and other political problems. Similarly, due to the irregularities in the political nature of these countries, corruption is prevalent, and this affects efficient nation-building processes. It could be argued that even though they are recorded successes in post-colonial

nations, propaganda, as well as domestic instability, is usually inherent (Morely, 2000, p. 27).

In regions such as Nigeria where the majority of elites are famous for corruption, various attempts to formulate nation-building continue to fail, more so, in a worse manner. The constant reports of diversion of funds meant for public projects by individuals and influential members continue to damper prospective nation-building. Similarly, the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian society has made the country susceptible to social clashes and domestic instability, hence, a little upset from corruption and other corrupt practices by people responsible for maintaining democracy in the nation creates significant negative effects on nation-building. The next section of the article discusses the nexus between nation-building and corruption in Nigeria.

3. Nexus Between Corruption and Nation-Building in Nigeria.

Corruption in Nigeria as discussed by Bello (2005, p. 32) follows a pattern of abuse of public office for personal or selfish gains. As a general practice in Nigeria, it is common to witness such abuse of public offices by office holders in all facets of the Nigerian government. Due to the multi-ethnic nature of the country, another aspect of corruption highly observed in Nigeria is the granting of favours and unmerited advantages to people coming from a similar ethnic background. This has continued to limit the growth of the nation since those who are eligible for such benefits and offices are often overlooked. Similarly, this practice unfairly supports people coming from their ethnic group or tribe while disregarding those coming from other parts of the country. This nature of preferential treatment is highly disastrous to the nation-building process as it creates an unequal society, illegally setting one higher than the other.

The nature of corruption in Nigeria was further highlighted by Otite (1986, p. 45) who submitted that due to the corrupt nature of the Nigerian elites in dispensing public duties, recording viable and tangible government policies for public support is very difficult. The elites are generally characterized by lack of integrity, hence, forcing them to seek bribes before carrying out official duties. This behaviour of asking for bribes or favour before conducting public duties has now transcended from the elites and is now recorded in all parts of the country. Hence, forcing people to relate giving bribes to lubricating hands for faster movement or action.

This act of bribery and corruption as highlighted by Igbuzor (2008, p. 4) has continued to force Nigeria to remain in an impoverished and under-development state, hence forcing people to migrate to other nations. Additionally, the idea of nation-building for many Nigerians is nothing but a facade as most attempts made towards providing nation-building projects are now obsolete or are used as a mechanism by the elite to further enrich themselves. The increased level of corruption amongst the elites in Nigeria is the major reason for the persistent election violence in Nigeria that continues to deter political growth and development. This is borne out of the fact that the elites would love to remain in power, hence, they seek to use all sorts of means, mostly violent means to maintain political position.

In a situation where elections are not free and fair, it could be agreed that state institutions are most likely unorganized or biased, therefore, nation-building processes are mere stories with no importance to the larger members of the society. When the citizens are robbed of the opportunity of choosing leaders for themselves, they lose interest in the political process which as a corollary means losing interest in the political authority of the regime.

As highlighted by Audu (2008, p. 16), despite the anti-corruption attempts of various Nigerian presidents, corruption is still persistent and increases constantly. This highlights the endemic nature of corruption in the Nigerian system that is sponsored by elites and now widely distributed across the country. The failure of Nigeria to effectively manage and tackle the different manifestations of corruption impeded the country's nation-building efforts dating right from Nigeria's independence. It is believed to be a major cause of the nation's first military coup in 1966 as a result of corruption. Similarly, the Biafran civil war which started in 1967 was triggered by the increasing rate of corruption in Nigeria.

From these independent years, corruption in Nigeria took different forms, with each regime recording higher levels of corruption than the one before. As mentioned by Falode (2019, 191), all aspects of the country witnessed an increasing level of corruption from elites whether during democracy or in the military regime. In the fourth republic, the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo initiated the formation of various anti-corruption agencies such as ICPC and EFCC, however, these agencies have done very little in fulfilling their major aim. The chairman of EFCC was in 2020 arraigned for corrupt practices (AA, 2020).

Obasanjo's presidential tenure started in 1999 and ended in 2007, laden with various accusations of corruption, a most notable accusation is the telecommunication saga where influential members of the government were accused of collecting huge sums of bribes from foreign companies. As President Jonathan came into power, corruption even increased, this time involving people in the police as well as people in the legislature. Additionally, members of former President Jonathan's cabinet were reported to have been involved in high-grade corruption. A notable example is the former minister of Aviation Stella Oduah who received two BMW cars running into millions of dollars from the treasury of the Aviation ministry.

Although President Buhari swore to fight against corruption when elected into power, the situation of the

country has not changed from what it was. It is generally agreed that things grew worse with higher poverty levels and a greater level of inequality. Similarly, a sitting governor was caught on camera receiving a bundle of dollars in bribes, however, nothing was done to him. Also, during the COVID-19 lockdown when schools and other social gatherings were closed, the Minister for Humanitarian Affairs attracted backlash when she said over 500 Million Naira (approximately 1.2 million USD) were used to feed school children, who were not in school due to the lockdown (Adesomoju, 2021).

Additionally, President Buhari's government is accused of being tribalistic or religious centric as political, military, and civil service appointments are mostly granted to people from his region or people in similar religion as he. This further maintains the elitist nature of the Nigerian society, hence, unjustly providing employment to people that will ensure the sustainability of the elite state against those from other ethnic regions. Besides the corruption associated with appointment and employment, the Nigerian media is constantly carrying news of one public office holder caught committing corruption offences. The Chairman of the EFCC arraigned for corrupt practices was appointed by President Buhari, and over 85 % of the president's cabinet members are all older political statesmen that are generally regarded as being very corrupt.

For this reason, attempts made to develop nation-building in Nigeria continues to be inefficient as a majority of the citizens are poor and are unhappy with the corrupt state of the nation that continues to favour the minority elite over the majority ruled. In 2020, protests erupted against police brutality and the constant harassment of police officers particularly belonging to a police unit known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). This protest, although started as an end-SARS movement, quickly moved into a youth revolution against corruption, inequality, insecurity, unemployment, and lack of human development opportunities. However, some of the protesters were fired at and killed by members of the Nigerian Army at the Lekki Tollgate massacre on 20th October 2020 (Amnesty International, 2020). To this day, no arrest has been made nor did the president provide any interest in the case.

From the above discussion, it is understood that the current nature of the Nigerian society is highly disintegrated as there is no trust nor belief in the government state apparatus. Corruption continues to make situations very tense for the ordinary citizens as the elite continue to live jet-set life and squandering public funds. The country according to foreign media is being referred to as the poverty capital of the world, for this reason, many young Nigerians continue to seek greener pastures abroad.

As expected in corrupt societies, especially one as corrupt as Nigeria, insecurity, poverty, strife, unemployment, hardship, and undemocratic values are present. These factors make nation-building processes extremely difficult and almost impossible. Therefore, Nigerian society continues to suffer ineffective nation-building policies that have affected all parts of the country.

4. Conclusion

The discussion of poverty applies to all countries, however, to varying degrees. Corruption may be minimal in some nations while exhibiting higher levels in other nations. Hence, corruption draws a universal element, plaguing every country where it is present. The article focuses on the level of corruption in Nigeria and how this affects nation-building in the country.

As discussed, corruption in Nigeria is endemic and it is reflected in all parts of society. However, the study focuses on the elite theory, providing an understanding of how elites continue to engage in corruption as a means of solidifying their powers over the ruled. Elites in Nigeria play an important role in formulating nation-building policies since they possess financial capabilities, charismatic power, political power, law-making powers and even social importance. However, the elites are constantly looking for ways to enrich their pockets from public funds, hence, the public is left impoverished.

In a society such as Nigeria where corruption is laced in all parts of public life, people begin to lose hope in the central nation, and in most cases, they lose hope in the state. This explains why most Nigerians are looking for ways to leave the country and settle in other nations. Corruption breeds poverty, under-development, suffering, hardship, unemployment, insecurity, inequality, and domestic instability. Hence, people would naturally avoid being present in such situations.

The study also highlights that various attempts provided by the Nigerian government to fight against corruption have made very little effort as government officers use these offices as a means to further enrich themselves. An interesting example was provided where the Chairman of an anti-corruption agency known as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), was himself indicted in a case of corruption. Therefore, the level of corruption in Nigeria can be understood to be surpassing and at very high levels.

The results from corruption, which are mostly socio-economic, continue to hinder Nigeria's nation-building processes and create a greater level of distrust against the central Nigerian state.

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