

Factors Militating Against Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Appraising the Causes of Political Corruption in Bayelsa State

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doi : <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjpsa.2013/vol13n16068>

Published: April 15, 2025

Citation: Ogbotubo L.O., and Christopher F. (2025) Factors Militating Against Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Appraising the Causes of Political Corruption in Bayelsa State, *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, Vol.13, No.1, pp.60-68

Abstract: *Political corruption is a global phenomenon that has continued to hinder the practice of democracy in all political environments, inhibiting the dividends of democratic governance. As contained in this study, the causes of political corruption in Bayelsa State, like in any other political environment includes; ostentatious lifestyle of the political class, primordial sentiment, weak institution, an unenlightened followership, inequality and poverty, bad governance etc. This study, “Factors Militating against democratic governance appraising the causes of political corruption in Bayelsa State, is an examination of the causes of political corruption and how they inhibit the dividends of democratic governance. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods in the collection and analysis of data. The elite theory was employed as the theoretical framework for the study, to explain the personalisation of governance by the political class. It is observed that, in a bid to continue to personalise governance in the state, the political class have put in place measures to maintain the status quo. The persistence of this phenomenon denies the state infrastructural and human capital development, therefore civil society groups should rise up to the occasion to enlighten the people on the evils of political corruption, and ensure they (people) stand to defend their votes during elections.*

Keywords: Bayelsa state, corruption, democratic governor, political corruption

INTRODUCTION

Globally, democratic governance is the most popular system of governance because of its inherent features, however, these features are inhibited in political environments where political corruption manifests. Today democratic governance in Nigeria faces a dilemma due to political corruption. Free and fair elections which is one of the basic features of a true democracy has eluded the country (Ebegbulem, 2012). Bayelsa State which was created on 1st October 1996 has recorded several

political corruption cases that have brought her to national and international limelight. The first executive governor and several high-ranking political office holders have been entangled in corruption. The optimal performance of democracy in one political environment does not mean same in another environment, therefore factors inherent in the political environment determines the success or failure of democracy. Political corruption, which hinders democratic governance in all political environments manifests in different ways.

As contained in this study, the causes of political corruption in Nigeria which includes amongst other things; primordial sentiments, weak institutions, ostentations lifestyle of the political class, an unenlightened followership, bad governance etc., may not all apply to other environments. These causes of political corruption in Nigeria demotes the people who are the essence of democratic governance the dividends of democratic governance. Its effects on the economy and wider society, though are well researched yet not completely. Political corruption thus inhibits economic growth, affects businesses, employment and investments, as well as reduces tax revenue and the effectiveness of various financial assistance programs (Vito, 2018).

As observed in the study, the benefits of democratic governance, some of which are; good governance, protection of fundamental human rights, the people exercising ultimate power, an independent electoral system, majority rule, etc., are below the average mark in Bayelsa State, and this is caused by corruption of the political class. To address the menace of political corruption, legislations should be made (which could be done through civil society organisations) to put in place the capital punishment, to deter the political class from corrupt practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the elite theory, though there are other theories that could have been used for this work. This study, “the factors militating against democratic governance in Nigeria: Appraising the causes of political corruption in Bayelsa State”, employed the elite theory as its theoretical framework. The leading proponents of the elite theory are Viltredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Graetano Mosca (1858-1941).

As Pareto (1848-1923) put it, there is in every civilised society an economic, political, scientific, artistic etc., elite which are relatively a small group of persons, who dominate almost all spheres of the state (Argawal, 2007). There are those who control the state and allocate values accordingly because they wield political power and there are those who are subject to the dictates of these elite that exercise political power. The dominant argument therefore is that the large mass of the people are ignoble, not cohesive and not organised, therefore not capable to exercise political power, making them subject to the few elite that exercise political power (Ntete-Nna, 2004).

The elite theory is applied in this study to explain the mismanagement of the state by the few political elite, who in a bid to inordinately satisfy themselves and their associates indulge in corrupt practices, therefore distorting democratic governance and denying the people of the likely benefits

of democracy. The theory holds the view that public policy is fundamentally influence by the values, interest and preferences of a political elite class (Nte, 2016).

Democratic Governance

Anything that has to do with democracy has to do with the people. Democratic governance entails a system where the people hold and exercise power through their representatives. This way citizens participate in governance through their elected representatives. Democratic governance implies a governance system that acts according to the will of the people, constituted by the people and is accountable to the people (Johari 2018). There are basic principles of every democratic system, some of which are: Rule of law, Separation of power, Free and fair election, fundamental human right, popular sovereignty, political participation, periodic elections etc. These features are not all prevalent in all democratic systems because of prevailing environmental factors such as political corruption.

Corruption

Like every other concept in social science, the meaning of corruption is widely disputed because it has been defined from different angles and its definition is shaped by the perception of the scholar defining it. The simplest way we can define the term is that it is misuse or abuse of power for personal or private gains. Corruption is defined as “abuse of power for private gain” by The United Nations Global Programme against Corruption (GPAC) cited by Dialoke et al. (2020). A better, clear and focused definition was offered by Transparency International (2013), corruption was described as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. It can also be viewed as a change from the laws or generally accepted rules for personal or selfish gain. Corruption is found in every organization be it political, economic or social organization.

A clearer picture of corruption was Presented by Ogundiya (2009) when he argued that corruption can be highlighted using certain behaviors. Such behaviors could be viewed as embezzlement, bribery, conflict of interests, fraud, misappropriation, extortion, rigging of elections, conversion of public funds for personal gains, diversion and manipulation of procurement processes, falsification of financial records etc. Corruption has also been viewed as a deliberate action or inaction by a person or group either private or public to obtain personal benefits or for a relation, associate, or group in a manner that is against the laid down rules, ethics, and/or moral codes, resulting to perversion of justice and fairness (Ofoeze, 2004). It must be noted here that countries with abundant natural resources are believed to be most corrupt. Usually corruption is problematic for many nations. Corruption is viewed from both private and public perspectives. Duke & Agbaji (2017) sees corruption to be “characterized as all form of deviant or immoral behavior, malfeasance, and other unlawful use of authority, ranging from the granting and accepting of financial benefits, to the cover-up of assets and properties gained illegitimately”. Corruption also entails giving non-monetary incentives to individuals, relations, associates, party etc.

Major Causes of Political Corruption in Nigeria

Political corruption in Nigeria is a pervasive issue that undermines democratic governance, economic development, and social equity. Understanding the major causes of political corruption is essential for developing effective strategies to combat it. This detailed analysis explores the primary factors contributing to political corruption in Nigeria, supported by relevant academic sources.

Weak Institutional Framework

One of the primary causes of political corruption in Nigeria is the weak institutional framework. The country's institutions, including the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and anti-corruption bodies, often lack the necessary independence and resources to effectively combat corruption. The compromised integrity of these institutions allows corrupt practices to thrive without significant repercussions (Nwaobi, 2020).

Poor Governance and Leadership

Poor governance and leadership are significant contributors to political corruption in Nigeria. Leaders who prioritize personal gain over public service create an environment where corruption is normalized. The lack of accountability and transparency in government operations enables officials to engage in corrupt activities with impunity (Osoba, 1996).

Economic Inequality and Poverty

Economic inequality and widespread poverty are also major drivers of political corruption in Nigeria. When a significant portion of the population is impoverished, individuals are more likely to engage in corrupt practices as a means of survival. Additionally, politicians exploit poverty by buying votes and offering bribes to secure political support, perpetuating a cycle of corruption (Akanbi, 2004).

Patronage and Clientelism

The political system in Nigeria is heavily influenced by patronage and clientelism, where political support is exchanged for material benefits. This system encourages politicians to engage in corrupt practices to maintain their power and control. Political patronage undermines meritocracy and institutional integrity, fostering an environment where corruption flourishes (Joseph, 1987).

Lack of Political Will

A significant barrier to combating political corruption in Nigeria is the lack of political will among leaders. Despite the existence of anti-corruption laws and agencies, the enforcement of these measures is often weak due to the reluctance of political leaders to prosecute their allies and supporters. This lack of commitment to fighting corruption allows it to persist and grow (Ribadu, 2010).

Inadequate Legal Framework

The legal framework in Nigeria is often inadequate in addressing the complexities of political corruption. Loopholes in the laws and regulations, along with weak enforcement mechanisms, provide opportunities for corrupt practices to occur. Strengthening the legal framework and ensuring rigorous enforcement are crucial steps in reducing corruption (Agbibo, 2012).

Ethnicity

This entire factor is dominant in Nigeria, Individuals who occupy political offices, either at the national or state, put their ethnic interest first before the national interest. This is why when a politically corrupt individual is caught and prosecuted, you see his or her ethnic group always on the defensive side.

Cultural Factors

Cultural factors also play a role in the prevalence of political corruption in Nigeria. Traditional norms and values, such as loyalty to family and ethnic groups, can sometimes conflict with the principles of public accountability and transparency. This cultural context can create an environment where corrupt behavior is tolerated or even expected (Oluwole, 2000). The major causes of political corruption in Nigeria are multifaceted, involving weak institutions, poor governance, economic inequality, patronage systems, lack of political will, inadequate legal frameworks, and cultural influences. Addressing these root causes requires comprehensive reforms, including strengthening institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, reducing poverty, and fostering a political culture that prioritizes public service over personal gain. By tackling these issues, Nigeria can make significant strides in combating political corruption and promoting sustainable development.

Examples of Political Corruption Cases in Nigeria/Bayelsa State

This study seeks to examine corruption cases in Nigeria with special focus on corruption cases involving Nigerian public office holders. There are many corruption cases in Nigeria, but most talked about ones are the ones considered as grand corruption cases. When talking about grand corruption in Nigeria, it involves public office holders both elected and appointed. Many state governors have pending corruption cases in court following the expiration of their tenure in office. Likewise, many senators, members of both federal and state house of assemblies, ministers, commissioners, directors of several government agencies are facing corrupt charges. In this study, corruption cases of former Petroleum minister Deizani Alison Madueke, former National Security Adviser Sambo Dasuki, former secretary of the federation Babachir Lawal, and the case of Rasheed Maina, former chairman of the defunct Pension Reform Taskforce Team are some recorded cases of corruption in Nigeria.

Bayelsa State has also recorded some high profile corruption cases that has thrown the state into national and international limelight. The first executive Governor of Bayelsa state was arrested in the UK for corruption and money laundering related offenses, which led to his prosecution and

eventual conviction. A former Senior Special Assistant on Millenium development Goals (Embeleakpo Apere) to former Governor Seriake Dickson was arraigned alongside Oriazy Global Link Limited, Clever Loveday and Rollins Amacree, on 28th January 2021, by the Economic and financial crimes commission (EFCC) before Justice Jane E. Iyang of the Federal High Court in Yenagoa on 10-count charges bordering on procurement fraud and conspiracy to the tune of ₦864,104,000 (EFCC). There are several other cases involving political office holders in the State. In fact the State had even gone to court to stop ICPC from investigating corrupt office holders in the state. Though many may have gone uncaught with corrupt practices, the absence of meaningful infrastructural and human capital development is a demonstration of deep-seated corruption in the state. On August 10, 2021, the premium times reported that former Governor Seriake Dickson was in the custody of the EFCC for offenses relating to misappropriation of public funds and abuse of office.

The Bayelsa State Government through the states attorney General, had gone to court to challenge the powers of ICPC to demand for records of financial expenditure of the state Government for the purpose of carrying out investigation into the alleged corrupt practices by some past and serving public functionaries in the state (secretary to the Government and account General of the state).

The independent corrupt practices and other related offenses commission (ICPC), told a federal high court in Yenagoa to prevent the Bayelsa State Government from stopping the investigation of allegation of corruption levelled against some members of the state Government.

Data Presentation and Analysis

RQ1: Causes of Political Corruption

| S/N | Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|--|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Multidimensional policy | 200 | 50% |
| 2 | Expensive lifestyle of the political class | 310 | 77.5% |
| 3 | Primordial sentiment | 280 | 70% |
| 4 | Weak institutions | 320 | 80% |
| 5 | An enlightened followership | 190 | 47.5 |
| 6. | Fear of the unknown | 215 | 53.75% |

Source: Field Work

The table above shows the response of the 400 respondents to the items in relation to the causes of political corruption in Bayelsa State. As shown in the table above, in responding to item 1, on the table 150 respondents are of the view that multidimensional poverty is a cause of political corruption. This number which is 50% of the total number of respondents did not overwhelmingly agree that multidimensional poverty is caused by political corruption.

Expensive lifestyle of the political class is also a cause of political corruption as shown on the table. 310 respondents are of the view that the ostentatious lifestyle of the politicians causes political corruption, which amounts to about 77.5% of total respondents. This means that, in a bid to maintain this lifestyle the political class indulge in corrupt practices. 70% (280) of respondents also agree that primordial sentiments cause political corruption. This again has to do with the political class, because as shown their loyalty is first their roots before the common interest. Weak institutions cause political corruption as shown in the study. When the institutions saddled with the constitutional responsibility to fight corruption compromise or do not have the capacity to confront the corrupt political class, they (the political class) will continue to indulge in corrupt practices undeterred. As shown, 320 respondents, which is 80% of total respondents agree weak institutions encourages political corruption. 190 respondents, which is 47.5% of the total respondents were of the view that an unenlightened followership causes political corruption in Bayelsa state. As shown this number is below average of the total number of respondents, meaning that majority did not agree. Majority of respondents agree that, for fear of the unknown, politicians also indulge in corrupt practices to secure the future for their families and even children unborn, 215 respondents, about 53.75% were of the view that fear of the unknown causes political corruption in Bayelsa State.

RQ2: Benefits of Democratic Governance

| S/N | Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|---|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Good governance | 120 | 30% |
| 2 | Ultimate power is exercised by the people | 155 | 38.75% |
| 3 | An independent electoral system | 110 | 27.5% |
| 4 | Protection of Fundamental human rights | 140 | 35% |
| 5 | Infrastructural and human capital development | 200 | 50% |
| 6. | Gives room for representative government | 295 | 73.75% |

Source: Field work

The table above shows the response of respondents to items in relation to the benefits of democratic governance in Bayelsa State. Respondents responded to six items in relation to the research questions as shown on the table. 120 respondents (30%) were of the view that good governance is one of the benefits of democratic governance, while 280 respondents thought otherwise. This means that majority of the respondents do not agree that good governance is a benefit of democratic governance. In response to whether ultimate power is exercised by the people, 155 respondents, about 38.75% was in the affirmative while majority of respondents were of the view that the people do not exercise ultimate power.

As shown on the table, 110 respondents, which is about 27.5% agreed that the independent electoral system is one of the benefits of our democratic system, majority of the respondents were of the view that, the independent electoral system under our democracy is not truly independent. In response to whether the democracy we practice safeguards fundamental human rights, 140

respondents, which constitutes about 35% of the total human rights, 140 respondents, which constitutes about 35% of the total respondents believes our democracy protects fundamental human rights, while 260 respondents were of the view that it does not.

Respondents were equally divided in response to whether, our democracy elicits infrastructural and human capital development. 200 respondents (50%) which is average of the total respondents were in the affirmative while the other half do not agree. On whether democratic governance gives room for representative government, 295 respondents, about 73.75% of total respondents were in agreement that representative government is a benefit of democratic governance.

CONCLUSION

This study, factors militating against democratic governance in Nigeria: appraising the causes of political corruption”, is centred basically on the benefits of democratic governance, and cause of political corruption. Democratic governance comparatively is the best form of government today because of its inherent features, but these features are denied in some political environments because of political corruption. It is observed that these hindrances to democratic governance continue to prevail because the political class has personalised the state. The optimal benefits of democratic governance are denied the people in Bayelsa State because political corruption prevails. There should be massive enlightenment and sensitisation of the people, that it is their constitutional right to vote corrupt political leaders out of office.

Recommendations

Having gone through the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. The civil society organisations should embark on a massive campaign to enlighten and sensitise the people that power belongs to them and they should exercise this power to vote out of office, corrupt political leaders, so as to address the problem of bad governance.
2. Legislations should be made to make the electoral body independent from the executive, including the appointment of its officers. This will bring an end to the subservience of the electoral systems to the political class.
3. Capital punishment laws should be enacted to deter the corrupt political class, as it is obtainable in some parts of Asia.

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