

CORRUPTION AND INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM PLATO'S THEORY OF JUSTICE

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Abstract

Corruption has been the major drawback to Nigeria's developmental efforts. Inequality abound in every facet of the society. The disparity between the rich and poor keeps widening with each new day. The government has made several efforts through the setting up of some anti corruption agencies such as: the EFCC, and ICPC yet little progress have been made on the war on corruption. People are appointed based on their connection rather than on their qualification. Using Plato's theory of justice, the research points out that the ever increasing gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria is as a result of corruption especially; nepotism. To this end, the research suggested that transparency should be the watch word when it comes to government appointments, that way will ensure that people are rest assured that those selected for jobs are selected based on merits not friendship or relationship as this will not only restore confidence in the system, but will also encourage hard work from others who seek to occupy places of authority and this in turn will make Nigerians viable and thus reduce inefficiency and inequality.

Keywords: Corruption, Inequality and Justice

Introduction/ Statement of the Problem

Any attempt to define the term 'corruption' will open the 'Pandora box' of semantic confusion that has bedeviled the term as scholars seem not to be in agreement as to what actions constitute corruption. Thus, one of the greatest challenges that faces a study of corruption is its definition as any definition given would end up setting the standard of measurement as to what it is taken to mean with the danger of missing key components. The World Bank defines corruption as "the abuse of public power for private benefit" this definition has been accused of being too simple, vague and myopic as it has failed to take cognizance of the fact that corruption is not limited to the public sector as it can also and do exist in the private sector. Tanzi tried to compensate for the lacuna of the World Bank's definition by defining corruption as "the intentional non-compliance with the arm's-length principle aimed at deriving some advantage for oneself or for related individuals from this behavior." The word 'intentional' should not be sugar coated to omit ignorance as an excuse for actions that fall within the purview of the term as ignorance does not beg the law. Rogow and Lasswell (1963: 132-133) posited that corruption is a violation of the public interest. This definition like the one given by the World Bank is shrouded in ambiguity

thus, Ogundiya (2009) rightly noted that “public interest like public opinion is difficult to determine” and as such; the definition is vague. While scholars seem not to unanimously agree as to what corruption is, they seem to agree that any behavior that is aimed at bending the law to gain an advantage or place others in a disadvantageous position in an unlawful manner constitutes an act of corruption.

The link between inequality and corruption seems compelling. Corruption is exploitive. Inequality breeds corruption by: leading ordinary citizens to see the system as stacked against them (Uslaner 2002, 181–83). It is in line with this that Eric (2011) argued that; “Economic inequality creates political leaders whomake patronage a virtue rather than a vice, since it provides jobs for ordinary citizens. These leaders *help* their constituents, but more critically *they help themselves*. Inequality breeds corruption and leadsto a dependency of the poor on the political leaders”. Little wonder Tanzi (1995) asserts that “benefits from corruption are likely to accrue to the better connected individuals in society, who belong mostly to high-income groups. Thus, corruption would affect not only broad macroeconomic variables, such as investment and growth, but also income distribution”. To this end, Ogundiya (2009) noted that any attempt to understand the tragedy of development and the challenges to democracy in most developing countries (Nigeria inclusive), must come to grips with the problem of corruption and stupendous wastage of scarce resources. It is in light of the above that Samuel (2011) asserted that the “the ultimate problem of politics is that of justice, and this is pursued (in politics) with the sole aim to achieve social development”.

Nigeria has been described as a paradox by scholars of development. A country that is blessed with an abundance of natural resources but: still harbors a significant amount of people living below the one dollar poverty line. The disparity between the haves and have not is so significant that her citizens have been mockingly referred to as a people ‘poor in wealth’. Commenting on the Nigerian situation the great literature icon Chinua Achebe asserted that the problem with Nigeria:

...is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership (Achebe, 1984: 1).

The above is true; for it was the character of the Nigerian political class that made her once occupy the infamous position of the most corrupt country in the world. It is in light of this leadership dilemma that has stirred the country to her lowest political point that this research work has attempted to use Plato’s theory of justice to show what we have been doing wrong all these while.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical road map for this research endeavor is the Plato’s theory of justice. Plato wrote quite a few dialogues, and several letters. He started with a critique on some claims on what constitutes justice. For Cephalous, justice meant to “to tell the truth and to pay

back debts". Plato's quarrel with this line of thought was that the truth ought to be told only at the appropriate time. Truth that causes unnecessary hurt is better delayed. More so, if one borrowed a matchet from a man and later finds out that the man is now mentally ill, should the matchet be returned? This raises the issue of paying back debt when appropriate pulling down the theory of paying back debts always. Plato also registered his dislike for Polemarchus' view on justice which is to "help your friends and hurt your enemies". The question is should one help his friend even when doing evil or hurt his enemy when he is useful to society? In 'The Republic', Plato presents a critique of existing Athenian society through the words of the Sophist: Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus defines justice as "the advantage of the stronger" where the stronger is the ruler or the ruling class. Thrasymachus goes on to explain that each government makes laws advantageous to itself. Everyone is expected to obey such laws. To obey was to act justly and to disobey was to commit an injustice. But every act of obedience helped to further the interest of the ruling class. Hence, justice (obeying the laws) is the advantage of the stronger (the rulers).

Plato held the view that virtue is knowledge. This view of virtue as knowledge meant that in fact there did exist objectively a good life. This idea of the good could be made an object of study through a methodologically set process. This also meant that it could be studied intelligently, and therefore, that life, especially political life, could not be left in the hands of the masses, nor could it be a matter of opinion. In a simple term, this simply means that politics and political theory could be studied as a science. Plato concluded by saying that only those who have acquired the mastery of this science of government, of rulership should rule everywhere. The point Plato is trying to make here is that it is only the philosopher that is best qualified to rule because having apprehended the knowledge of the Good through thought he/she alone possesses the knowledge to govern the society with justice. Plato's theory is based on the principle of reciprocal needs. Each person gives to the social association the best that he/she can give according to his/her natural ability and training. Thus, Plato divides the ideal society into three functional groups. This division of society is backed by the myth commonly called the "Myth of Metals".

Figure 1: The Myth of Metal

The Myth of Metals		
Group	Metal	Functions
Economic Group	Iron and Bronze	Production
Auxiliaries	Silver	Defense
Philosophers Rulers	Gold	Ruling

The central argument of Plato's theory is that if every man does what he is best suited for, then the society will be a better place. How does this suit to the Nigerian situation? Nigeria a country where unqualified people go about mounting the helm of affairs, while the qualified ones are pushed aside now imagine every man doing what he is best suited and how this will help in the country's struggle to break out from the stigma of being referred to as a third world country.

Corruption and Inequality in Nigeria: Inefficient Leaders a Product of a Corrupt Electoral Process

So many scholars have written on the developmental challenges confronting Nigeria. The gap between the rich and the poor expands with each new day thereby widening the level of inequality that exists in the country. A whopping 60 percent of the country's population lives below the poverty line. While so many reasons have been adduced as to the cause of the growing level of inequality in the country, the most notable one is the assumption that Nigeria lacks credible leaders. Prominent among scholars upholding this view is Chinua Achebe the late literature icon.

A glance at Nigeria's electoral history will reveal a history of violence and electoral irregularities. As a matter of fact, due to the corrupt nature of elections in Nigeria, election results are rejected by all except the winner that is why winners in Nigeria's election are often times determined by the court instead of the ballot. Scholars have blamed this on the nature of politics played in Nigeria; "zero sum game" where the winner takes all. It is so bad that it takes a lot of money to even lose an election. Thus, it will not be out of place to say that; Nigerian leaders are the product of her electoral process for a corrupt electoral process, gives birth to corrupt leaders.

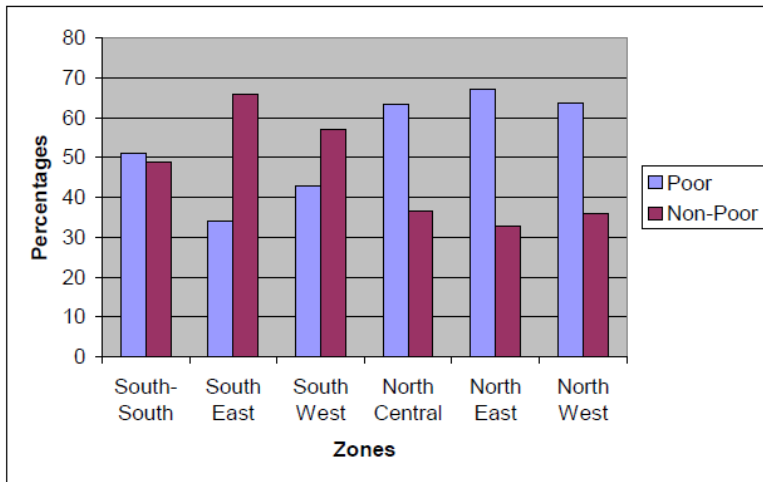
Sadly as noted by Ayo (2011), "this sad history of election fraud has serious implications for Nigeria's political future because the phenomenon rather than declining, keeps growing and becoming more sophisticated with every succeeding elections. The principal forms of election fraud or irregularities were perfected in the elections of 1964, 1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003 and 2007". The historical trajectories of electoral processes in Nigeria, shows pervasive struggle to control the electoral apparatus for selfish purposes. The political parties see their prospects for success in election as it is tied to their ability to manipulate the electoral system, or hijack the structures that favor other parties. Electoral malpractices therefore are a feature that is common with all the elections conducted in Nigeria (Uduma and Emerole, 2015). Based on the above, Ani, Emma, and Chinedu (2013) referred to the nature of elections conducted in Nigeria as an illness when they noted that

"Beyond any reasonable shade of doubt, there is a political illness that sweeps across Nigeria at any given election time since independence. This political illness is very contagious, disruptive and result to wrong choice of credible leaders to make development and healthy living occur. It has a name. We call it "severe Nigerian Electoral Fraud Anger Syndrome".

The effect of the above is misfit occupying places of authority while the competent ones are forced to watch the horror from the side line. A classical case of the above is the case of Ibrahim Salisu Buhari, the first Speaker of the House under Obasanjo, who resigned when it was discovered that he lied about his academic background and age. Buhari pleaded guilty to forgery and perjury and was fined N2,500 (US\$20) but is pardoned the following year.

Aside stolen mandate is the issue of patron-clientelism. Since elections are hijacked by the elites through electoral malpractices, the resultant effect is that the people cannot hold their leaders accountable for their actions. Public officials, who are supposed to serve the interest of the masses, are then forced to serve the interest of a few elites otherwise known as political god-fathers the resultant effect of this is that money that was meant for development would be spent repaying debts accumulated during the election process thereby expanding the gap between the haves and have not in the society. The effect of this is well captured in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Showing Poverty Incidence by Zone



Despite the billions of petrol dollar accruing to the country, it is only the South-East and South-West as revealed in Figure 2 that have more people living above the poverty line. What is even more frightening is that the poverty line is one dollar a day which is not even enough for the average man to survive. The above revelation is embarrassing for a country that claims to be the giant of Africa. Corruption contributes to the problem of mass poverty and rendered millions of Nigerians citizens unemployed and uneducated. Little wonder did Michael (2012) opined that; “over the years, Nigeria has seen its wealth withered with little to show in living conditions of the citizens”. It is truism that mass poverty has been a breeding ground for all forms of extremism in the frequent outbreak of ethno-religious violence in some parts of Nigeria (FRN, 2001 & Obadan, 2001).

Nigeria's Political Class: Democrats or Kleptocrats?

Prebendalism, kleptomaniacs, patron-clientelism, and neopatrimonialism are just but a few words used to describe Nigerian politicians and the kind of politics they play. As a matter of fact, there is a factoid making internet waves that the term neopatrimonialism was coined by Richard A. Joseph, director of The Program of African Studies at Northwestern University to describe the kind of politics played by Nigerian politicians. The above goes a long way to sum up the lugubrious situation Nigeria finds herself in.

Nigeria is a typical of a country in Africa whose development has been undermined and retrains by the menace of corrupt practices (Keeper, nd). When Nigeria gained political independence from the British colonial government on the 1st of October 1960, the people greeted it with much joy and enthusiasm as they were hopeful for a much better future under their own rulership as they could now control and manage their own affairs. But it is sad to note however, that, that hope was quickly shot lived as the country which stated with much promise, has struggled to free itself from the shackles of corruption which has eaten deep into the country that it is surprising to see a person who is not corrupt. It is in light of the above that Agbonifo(1985) noted that

As a matter of fact, the Nigerian society tends to overemphasize individual goal attainment at the expense of the legitimate means of achieving these set goals. In Nigeria, material acquisition has become the ultimate goal and the society does not appear to be concerned with how one “makes” it. All that is important is that one has “arrived”. The marked discrepancy believe the goals and means in our society invariably leads to various forms of corruption such as embezzlement of public fund, offering and acceptance of bribe, electoral rigging, examination malpractice, drug abuse

In view of the details of this rule and mismanagement that had characterized Nigeria and which has plunged the country into economy misery, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, the former EFCC chairman maintains that...over \$400 billion looted from the Commonwealth by leaders is “six times the total value of resources committed to rebuilding Western Europe after the Second World War (Ademola, 2011).

Although corruption can take many forms and dimensions, the form which has proven to be the most devastating in Nigeria is nepotism. Nepotism otherwise known as favoritism in layman's term is the act of using a position of trust to favor relatives or friends. This has proven to be the most dangerous form of corruption in Nigeria, as it has placed incompetent individuals in position of authority to the detriment of the masses. This occurs most times as a result of people who were brought through vote buying trying to compensate their godfathers for the huge amount of finance invested in their elections. The above assertion is up held by Salahu (2015) when he stated that

The institution of an illegal regime through ballot theft can be linked to bad governance and mismanagement of state resource. The instituted

government leadership along with their patrons and influential individuals loot the government treasury and careless for the masses.

Corruption has created inequality by making the rich richer and the poor poorer. The embezzlement of public funds that was meant for the creation of jobs for private use widens the invisible line; that is only made obvious by hardship between the two classes; Bourgeois and proleterates that exist in the society. The table below speaks volume of the level of corruption among Nigeria’s political class.

Table 1:Showing Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Profile Cases 2000 – 2010

S/N	Name	Case Status	Amount Involved	Status Suspect(s)
1	Ayo Fayose (Governor of Ekiti State)	Arrested on 51 counts	N1.2 billion	-
2	Adenike, Grange (former Minister of Health)	Arrested on 56 counts	N300 million	Discharged and acquitted
	Joshua Dariye (former Governor Plateau state)	Arrested on 23 counts	N700 million	-
4	Saminu Turaki (former Governor Jigawa state)	Arrested on 32 counts	N36 billion	-
5	Oji Uzor Kalu (former Governor Abia state)	Arrested on 107 state counts	N5 billion	-
6	James Ibori (former Governor Delta state)	Arrested on 170 counts	N9.2 billion	-
7	Iyabo Obasanjo (former Senator)	Arrested on 56 state counts	N10 million	-
8	LuckyIgbinedion (former Governor of Edo state)	Arrested on 191 state counts	N4.3 billion	Case determined, ordered to pay \$25 million as fine
9	Gabriel Aduku (former Minister of Health)	Arrested on 56 state counts	N300 million	Discharged and acquitted
10	Jolly Nyame (former Governor of Taraba state)	Arrested on 41 state counts	N1.3 billion	-
11	Chimaroke Nnamani (former Governor of Enugu state)	Arrested on 105 state counts	N5.3 billion	-
12	Michael Botmang (former Governor of Plateau state)	Arrested on 31 state counts	N1.5 billion	-
13	Roland Iyayi (former MD of FAAN)	Arrested on 11 state counts	N5.6 billion	-
14	Prof. Babalola Borishade (former Minister of Aviation)	Arrested on 11 state counts	N5.6 billion	-
15	Boni Haruna (former Governor of	Arrested on 28	N254	-

16	Adamawa state) Femi Fanikayode (former Governor of Adamawa state)	state counts Arraigned on 47 state counts	million N250 million	-
17	Bode George (PDP Chieftain)	Arraigned on 68 state counts	N100 billion	Jailed in October 2009
18	Rasheed Ladoja (former Governor of Oyo state)	Arraigned on 33 state counts	N6 billion	-

Source: Drawn from: Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in Usman (2013)

The table above is in itself frightening when it is put into perspective that what is captured above is just the ones brought to public notice by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). What is even more frightening is the number of those accused that go scot free. It should be noted that apart from James Ibori (former Delta state Governor) and Bode George (PDP Chieftain) none of the accused served jail term. There is no country in the world that will experience this level of corruption without shock. The Nigerian situation is pitiable, and unless something serious is done, the gap between the rich and the poor will continue to grow.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Credible elections is the only way leaders can be held accountable for their actions, and if elections do not reflect the choice of the people, then misfits will continue to occupy positions of authority.
- People are not good simply because they want to be good, strong institutions shape people’s behavior and Nigeria lacks strong institutions that is the reason why corruption has become a culture in Nigeria our institutions are too weak an easily manipulated by the ruling class to their favor. The only way we can checkmate the incidence of corruption in our country is to make our institutions responsive to it.
- Transparency should be the watch word when it comes to government appointments, that way the people would be rest assured that those selected for jobs are selected based on merits not nepotism. This will not only bring confidence into the system, but will also encourage hard work from others who will know that if they work hard, then they can achieve anything and this in turn will make Nigerians viable and thus reduce inefficiency and inequality.

Conclusion

The words of Plato are very much true when you look at the Nigerian situation. The level of injustice being perpetuated by the Nigerian ruling class on the people is quite alarming. The argument of Plato that each man should do what he is best suited for is the only way Nigeria can reduce the level of inequality in the country. The man no man syndrome were people are giving appointments and jobs based on who they know rather than based on their qualification is an injustice and justice can only be achieved when people are giving responsibilities based on their ability/competencerather than on who they know.

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