

## Systemic Corruption and its Multiplier Toll on the Electoral System: A Study of Nigeria

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### Abstract

Corruption is often referred to as a cankerworm that eats its way down the fabrics of a system such that its multiplier always takes an adverse toll on the society. This study examined the extent to which the phenomenon has affected the electoral system in Nigeria. Data was obtained from secondary materials including books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, the internet, etc. The methodology followed the technique of content analysis while the Functional and Rational Choice theory (Becker, 1976) was adopted as the theoretical framework. It was revealed in the study that, the corruption in the Nigerian society has eaten deep down the entire system that it affects the electoral process. The study recommended measures by government to fight and checkmate the menace in the system.

**Keywords:** *Corruption, Systemic corruption, Multiplier toll, Electoral system, Cankerworm, Phenomenon.*

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## **Background to the Study**

Corruption is a global phenomenon. It is therefore ubiquitous in character. The phenomenon is neither system bound nor culture specific. The severity and devastating effect vary from one society to another. Obviously, its effect is more severe among the developing countries due to the fragile political institutions, inadequate control mechanisms, and weak economic base. The pathological effects of corruption which include, democratic instability, veracious poverty, contract killings, insecurity, political assassinations, general developmental problems, electoral process, infrastructural decay, low level of governmental legitimacy, etc., have been quite devastating. Thus, despite its endowment in natural and human resources, it is an irony that Nigeria remains one of the most underdeveloped nations of the world largely because of the menace of corruption. Obadan (2001); Omotola (2007), observe that, “corruption has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria's developmental efforts and a way of life or doing things”. It is a well-known fact that the first, second and third Republics crashed essentially due to corruption of the political gladiators and the insatiable appetite for greed and power on the part of the military hierarchy. The failure rate of the previous republics as outlined above and the need to sustain the current democratic experiment, draw attention to the issue of corruption in Nigeria. Akanbi (2004); Omotola (2008) lament that;

*Despite official institutional mechanisms designed to tame the monster, the upsurge in the manifestations of diverse forms of corrupt practices since the inception of civil rule in 1999 has continued to be an impediment to the goals of socioeconomic development and democratization.*

As a concept, corrupt attracts different meanings to different people. One perspective views the phenomenon as, “any transaction which violates the duty of a public office holder with a partial motive of acquiring or amassing resources illegally for personal advancement and self-gratification (Odekunle, 1986; Otite, 1986). Egwemi (2012), asserts that “corruption is the act of siphoning public fund for private use”. There is no doubt that this clandestine activity erodes the moral integrity of a nation and hampers national development.

A study Olarinmoye (2008), titled “Godfathers, political parties and electoral corruption in Nigeria”, revealed that:

*Electoral corruption is the result not just of the avariciousness of godfathers and politicians but of the logic of electoral competition (zero-sum) which demands that political parties in Nigeria, incapacitated by a weak voter's mobilization capacity derived from their elite/caucus nature, resort to individuals (godfathers) possessing of certain attributes such as an “intuitive grasp of and control of local voting structure”, to effect electoral success through activities that distort the electoral process or through electoral competition.*

The study focused on the realities of existence of godfathers, political parties and voters in Nigeria. These godfathers initiate and sponsor every activity ranging from exerting their influence on the electoral body itself, hijacking party primaries and nominations, and the actual voting process. It is common knowledge that ballot boxes are snatched from polling stations while in some cases party officials/agents are bribed, and opposition politicians killed or maimed. This tends to affect the credibility of elections, the entire democracy and even

governance and political stability of the country. It is in this vein that this study seeks to investigate the effect of corruption on the electoral system in Nigeria. Specifically, the study examines the effect of corruption on

- (a) The activities of political parties in Nigeria in the 2015 general elections.
- (b) The voting pattern during 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

The study will provide answers to the following questions –

- (a) to what extent has corruption affected the activities of political parties in Nigeria in the 2015 general elections, and
- (b) How has the voting pattern at the 2015 general elections been affected by corruption?

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Literature**

**Corruption:** According to Ekiyor (2005), corruption is the “unlawful use of official power or influence by an official of the government either to enrich himself or further his course and/or any other person at the expense of the public, in convention of his oath of office and/or contrary to the conventions or laws that are in force supporting the above view. Gould and Kolb (1964) contend that corruption is not a characteristic of one period in political history nor of any one country. It is endemic in both authoritarian and party systems of government. As an evidence that the history of corruption is as old as the world, Scott (1972) is of the view that corruption 'must be understood as a regular, repetitive and integral part of the operation of most political systems'. A vital view of corruption is that it is intentional. This is a view that was heralded by Brooks (1970) who believed the corrupt official knows his duties, “but it is neglected or mis-performed for reasons narrower than those which the state intends. Interestingly, Brooks (1970) went ahead to distinguish the corrupt from the inefficient official. In his view, 'the corrupt official must know the better and choose the worse (but) the inefficient official does not know any better’.

**Systemic Corruption:** The World Bank is known to have offered the most widely used definitions of corruption. For the Bretton Woods Institution, corruption is simply the “abuse of public office for private gain”. In its expanded form, World Bank Report (1997) in its definition differentiated 'isolated' (or accidental) corruption from 'systemic corruption'. For the WB, 'isolated (or accidental) corruption is “rare consisting of a few acts, it is straight forward (though seldom easy) to detect and punish'. In this sense, non-corrupt behavior is the norm, and public and private sector institutions support integrity. Both formal and non-formal systems are strong enough to return the system to a “non-corrupt equilibrium”. Systemic corruption, on the other hand is pervasive, or entrenched, where corruption is routine between and within the public sector, companies or individuals. Formal and informal rules “are at odds with one another”. Corruption may be illegal, but in this case, it is understood to be routine in transactions with government or business. Equilibrium exists (also called a “systemic corruption trap”) where incentives for corruption are very attractive for companies, individuals and public servants – attractive to be exploited and not resisted, because of a high likelihood of success in a supportive corrupt environment.

**Electoral System:** An electoral system or voting is a set of rules that determine how elections and referendums are conducted and how their results are determined. Political electoral systems are organized by governments while non-political elections may take place in business, non-profit organization, such results govern all aspects of the voting process: when elections occur, who is allowed to vote, who can stand as a candidate, how ballots are marked and cast, how the ballots are counted, how votes translate into the election outcome, limits on campaign spending, and other factors that can affect result.

The electoral system has six goals which include:

Proportionality of seats to votes, accountability to constituents, durable governments, victories of the condorcet winners, interethnic and interreligious conciliation, minority office holding. Sartori (1968) describes electoral systems as “the most specific manipulative instrument of politics”. At the very basic level, electoral systems translate the votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates in the legislature at the national and, where relevant, the sub-national level as well (Raynolds, et. al. 2005). The key elements of an electoral system include –

1. The electoral formula (plurality/majority, proportional, mixed, or other).
2. The ballot structure (i.e. whether the voter votes for a candidate or a party and whether the voter makes a single choice or expresses a series of preferences).
3. The district magnitude (the number of representatives to the legislature that a particular district elects).

**Godfatherism:** In the views of Mbamara (2004), 'godfatherism' is the invasion of the political candidate by discarnate powerful sponsor, tending to complete possession for the purpose of selfish gratification. Mbamara (2004) believes that godfatherism is a political slave trade or political sponsorship based on political manipulation with several evil agenda. In this context, the godfather is the political slave merchant while the godson is the political slave boy or political article for sale. The godson is purchased with a big sum of money under oath. The aims and objectives of deal include access to appointments, stealing of government treasure. Ayoade (2006) cited in Omonijo, et. al. (2013) posits that: “the Godfather is not in the business of philanthropy”.

**Political Party:** A political party may be defined as:

*Anorganized and presumably durable association either of individuals or of distinguishable groups of individuals, which endeavors to place its members in governmental offices for the purpose of bringing about the adoption of favored political parties or programmes.*

One of the primary characteristics of a political party is its endeavor to control the exercise of governmental power by placing its own members in the public offices through which the policies of government are determined. It refers to a group of persons organized to acquire and exercise political power.

### **Empirical Literature**

This section reviews past and current related studies on systemic corruption and its effect on the Nigerian electoral system. This review is carried out on a tabular format as follows:

**Table 1.**

Name of researcher(s) year & Title of study	Geographical and content scope covered	Data source and Analytical tools	Findings / Conclusion / suggestions
Joseph, (2020). The impacts of political corruption on democratic consolidation and the electoral process in Nigeria.	Nigeria: Political corruption, democratic consolidation, and the electoral process.	Secondary sources were employed to obtain the data for the study.	In the views of the paper, the behavior of politicians has cast doubt on the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Free and fair elections have eluded Nigeria. There is massive corruption in the entire electoral process in Nigeria
Sule, Sam & Mat (2018). Corruption and electoral process in Nigeria: Examining the 2015 General Elections.	Nigeria: Corruption, electoral process, 2015 general elections.	Qualitative case study of data collection and analysis. Some agencies and stakeholders relevant to the study were selected and interviewed. They include EFCC, INEC, politicians, party stakeholders, academicians and members of the general public – it was a focus group discussion.	The paper discovered that the entire process of 2015 general elections was affected by corruption and corrupt practices in terms of using public treasury for campaign activities by politicians from the two major parties – APC and PDP in their campaign and other activities including vote buying, excessive media campaign, spending above limit, and bribing INEC officials. The paper recommends that for corruption to be eschewed in the Nigerian electoral process, INEC should be allowed a free hand to discharge her constitutional responsibilities while the EFCC should be involved in screening contestants for politic offices and violators banned from active politics for life.
Aluaigba (2016). Democracy deferred: The effects of electoral malpractice on Nigeria's path to democratic consolidation.	Nigeria: Democracy, electoral malpractice, Nigeria's path to democratic consolidation.	Secondary sources of data were employed for the study.	The paper observes that conduct of elections since return to civil rule in 1999 is nothing to write home about. The process has been inundated with spiraling malpractices in the electoral process. The trend has worsened with each round of elections, as typified by the 1999, 2003, 2007 polls. During these elections, rigging, violence and intimidation, were the order of the day.
Ola, Mohammed and Audi (2014). Effects of corruption on economic development in Nigeria.	Nigeria: Corruption, economic development	Data were drawn mainly from news stories and interviews of Nigerians with relevant information.	Results reveal that the level of corruption in the country have reduced due to governments anti-corruption instruments. In addition, this study found a negative correlation between levels of corruption and economic growth thereby making it difficult for Nigeria to develop fast.

### Theoretical Framework

Rational choice theory (Gary Becker, 1976)

This theory is also known as theory of rational choice, or choice theory or rational action theory. The theory is a framework for understanding and formally modeling social and economic behavior. The basic premise of rational choice theory is that aggregate social behavior results from the behavior of individual actors, each of whom is making their individual decisions. The theory also focuses on the determinants of the individual choices. The theory then assumes that an individual has preferences among the available choice alternatives that allow them to state which option they prefer. The rational agent is assumed to take account of available information, probabilities of events, and potential costs and benefits

in determining preferences, and to act consistently in choosing the self-determined best choice of action. In simpler terms, this theory dictates that every person, even when carrying out the most mundane of tasks, perform their own personal cost-benefit analysis in order to determine whether the action is worth pursuing for the best possible outcome. Corrupt practices involve decisions that take some time to engage in. It never comes by mistake but involves some measure of cost-benefit analysis. This is in conformity with most definitions of the term earlier advanced in this paper. This makes the rational choice theory relevant in this work. Hence, its adoption as the theoretical framework of this study.

### Methodology

This study is a descriptive analysis of the effect of corruption on the electoral system in Nigeria. Thus, data obtained mainly from secondary sources – books, journals, newspapers, the internet, etc are synthesized by the use of the technique of content analysis. The analysis runs in the following sequence:

**Research Question One (1):** To what extent did corruption affect the activities of political parties in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria?.

In the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, Sule, Sanian Mat (2018), observed that, “corruption is one of the socioeconomic malaises that bedeviled the Nigerian state for many decades which virtually eroded all aspects of good governance and effective service delivery to the Nigerian populace”. They (Sule, et. al, 20018) assert that, the cankerworm has affected democratic governance particularly the electoral process with vote buying, bribing of officials of the electoral body (INEC) and manipulation of the entire process. Furthermore, the paper discovered that the entire process of 2015 general elections was affected by corruption and corrupt practices in terms of using public treasury for campaign activities by politicians from the two major parties – the APC and PDP.

To lend credence to the above assertion, a joint report by USAID and UKAID disclosed that both APC and PDP used public treasury in sponsoring their campaigns at all levels. The spending went beyond the stipulated limits as enshrined in the 2010 electoral act which specifies the following as maximum spending limit for elective offices:

**Table 2:** Spending limits of candidates in conformity with the 2010 Electoral Act.

Position	Spending limit
Presidential candidate	₦ 1 Billion (\$ 3 183, 870.90)
Governorship candidate	₦ 200 Million (\$ 636, 774.10)
Senatorial candidate	₦ 40 million (\$ 127, 354.64)
Member, Federal House of Reps.	₦ 20 million (\$ 63, 677.42)
Member, State House of Assembly	₦ 10 million (\$ 31, 838.71)
L. G. Chairmanship candidate	₦ 10 Million (\$ 31, 836.71)
L. G. Councillorship candidate	₦ 1, 000, 000 (\$ 3, 183.671)

**Source:** Federal Government of Nigeria, Electoral Act 2010 as Amended.

The USAID/UKAID report revealed that both the presidential candidates for PDP and APC spent above the stipulated limits as illustrate below:

**Table 2:** Media spending of two major political party's APC and PDP in the 2015 general elections

Campaign expenses	PDP Presidential candidate (₦)	APC Presidential candidate (₦)
Campaign and Rallies	1, 280, 374, 870.00	671, 062, 200, 00
Expenses on Billboards	473, 160. 000.00	190, 380, 000.00
Electronic Media campaign	532, 100.000.00	410, 050.000.00
Electronic Media Advert	3, 988, 822, 125.00	1, 064, 706, 805.00
Print media campaign	2, 475, 228, 301.00	579, 647, 687.00
TOTAL	8, 749, 685, 296.000	2, 915, 846, 737.00

**Source:** USAID & UKAID, 2015

The above tables constitute enough evidence of massive corruption perpetrated by the two political parties during the 2015 general elections.

**Research Question Two (2):** How was the voting pattern at the 2015 general elections affected by corruption?

The study by Sule, Aziziddin, Sani and Mat (2017), found that the 2015 Presidential election differed slightly from other presidential elections for a number of reasons which included corruption. The paper recommended that for a better and free and fair election, the electorates should be re-oriented to focus their choice of leaders based on performance, accountability, issue-based campaign rather than gratification another factors.

Elections in Nigeria are marred with a political behaviour of rigging, manipulation of religion, ethnicity, regionalism and nepotism as observed by many scholars. Voters vote during elections based on their affinity with leaders who belong to the same ethnic cleavages, religious groups and other sentiments. Elections are marred in Nigeria with the intimidation of opposition political parties, violence, political thuggery and even bribery. They are instances of party agents sharing money and distributing rice and other food items to voters. Thus, Sule, et. al (2017) also underscored the issue of vote-buying during elections.

### Findings

The investigation revealed the following –

1. Corruption is neither society nor culture specific. It is ubiquitous in character and spread.
2. The cankerworm of corruption has adversely affected democratic governance particularly the electoral process through vote-buying, bribing electoral officials (IMEC) and manipulation of the entire process.
3. Godfatherism in Nigerian politics is one dangerous manifestation of corruption with every evil intent.
4. Both the Ruling Party in 2015 general elections and the opposition (APC) looted the public treasury to finance their campaigns – another clear manifestation of the systemic corruption in Nigeria.

5. Both parties listed above overshot their budget limits as stipulated in the 2010 electoral Act (Nigeria).
6. Elections in Nigeria are marred with political behaviour of rigging, manipulation of religion, ethnicity, regionalism and nepotism.
7. Voters discharge their civic responsibilities based on their affinity with leaders who belong to the same ethnic cleavages, religious groups and other sentiments.
8. Other issues which mar elections in Nigeria include – intimidation of opposition political parties and their supporters, violence, political thuggery and outright bribery.

### **Conclusion**

Corruption has been widely proclaimed as a cankerworm that eats deep down any system or society. This phenomenon is neither culture nor society specific. Its character is ubiquitous as it is found everywhere. However, it is a general notion among scholars that the poorer the nation, the more devastating the effect of corruption. Thus, developing nations are known to be experiencing more devastation from this phenomenon. As the phenomenon goes systemic, the more devastating the effects. It must also be underscored that, corruption is not a problem that can be eradicated; however, it is a challenge to be managed. Again, its ubiquitous character leads one to appreciate its existence in the electoral system of a country like Nigeria. This study is carried out to ascertain the effect of corruption on the electoral process in Nigeria. Particularly, the paper dwelt on the effect of this cankerworm on the activities of political parties and voting pattern of the electorates. The findings reveal adverse consequences on both variables partly due to the systemic nature of the malaise. Several consequences were revealed in the study. This leads to the suggestion that efforts should be made to improve on the electoral process with a view to enhancing the credibility of and integrity of the entire process.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the findings, this study suggests as follows –

1. Problem identification is the first step in the solution of the problem. Let Nigeria and its leaders recognize the presence of the phenomenon of corruption in the electoral system.
2. Nigerian leaders should resolve to shun the phenomenon of Godfatherism in Nigerian politics.
3. The two major political parties in this country should be barred from politics for five (5) consecutive years. This will serve as the punishment for using the public money for political gains.
4. Voters must be made to regain their confidence during voting. This is to say that intimidation of political opponents must be stopped.
5. Acts against the Electoral Act of 2010 in connection with going beyond stipulated expenditure limits for various office holders must be criminalized and punishable by prison/jail terms of not below five years.



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