

“CAUGHT IN THE ACT”: CORRUPTION AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is notorious for Corruption. This is particularly evidenced by successive annual Transparency International CPI Rankings, reports from International Financial Institutions and development practitioners. As if with the return of democracy, corruption was in the waiting, it correspondingly expanded and deepened. As political parties and elections are central to and synonymous with democratization, all activities to do with these acts are beclouded in corruption. The main aim of this paper is to investigate the seeming expansion of corruption into campaign finance of politicians and political parties and to therefore argue that internal and external problems of parties, electoral misconducts and insurgency-related insecurities could scientifically be explained from the perspectives of the problematiques of corruption in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Corruption, Political party, Campaign, Campaign Finance, Godfatherism*

Introduction

It is an obvious fact that there is a widespread acceptance of the view that corruption is a cankerworm that impinges on good governance and democratic dispensation in general. This has attracted enormous commitment by concerned parties to eradicate it from the very fabric of the society (Osaghae & Idehen, 2015). This is the reason government at different levels pledge new impetus directed towards eradicating it with a view to improving the lives of its citizenry and extenuating their suffering. Corruption is the root of the inability of some countries particularly the developing ones to successfully operate *liberal democracy*. Specifically, the prevalence of corruption in developing countries such as Nigeria has devastating influence on electoral process in particular and the polity in general. This manifests mostly in the general weakening of the state and rendering it incapable of performing its traditional functions of protecting the citizens and providing them with the much-needed social amenities and infrastructure (Odock, 2006). The contending issue is that democracy in this part of the world is very expensive which makes it difficult for ordinary citizens to adequately participate in its processes. The political parties are often hijacked by few influential individuals who are considered to be the providers of financial backing for campaign and other party activities. The activities and influence of whom have been working to the detriment of fighting corruption in Nigeria. The main focus of the article is therefore to explore the dynamics of corruption fight in Nigeria. This will be done through the lenses of campaign financing.

Why Money matters in Politics?

The role of money in politics could be viewed from two perspectives. On one hand, campaign spending is a constitutionally protected right vital to informing and mobilizing ordinary citizens

(Michael, 2004). On the other hand, privately financed campaigns may induce politicians to favour wealthy special interests at the expense of those very same ordinary citizens. In other words, money in politics has both costs and benefits. Its costs are enormous as it can distort policy in two ways. First, contributors may use a “legislative strategy” to buy votes or policy favours from elected officials. The second way money can distort policy is if contributors use an ‘electoral strategy’ to affect who is elected. In this strategy, contributors do not seek access or inherent advantageous arrangements, but simply give to candidates with whom they agree or they think will advance their firm or organization’s goals (Smith 2001). This strategy could sometimes be viewed as more benign, but can nonetheless potentially distort policy in at least two ways. If candidates who appeal to contributors have an electoral advantage, the direct effect will be to increase the number of pro-contributor candidates who win. The indirect effect will encourage all candidates to become pro-contributor in order to increase their chances of electoral success.

The effect of money in this case will be very difficult to observe. The whole political system may be affected and the range of viable political competition may be limited. For example even candidates who do not receive money may be pro-contributor in order to limit the amounts their opponents can raise (Smith, 2001). Importantly, these distortions occur even if contributors are not seeking access or specific policy favours, but simply giving to candidates whom they favour ideologically. As stated earlier, money is also beneficial in politics. It is crucial to the democratic clash of ideas. As the Court stated in *Buckley v. Valeo*: “Virtually every means of communicating ideas in today’s mass society requires the expenditure of money. (as cited in Michael, 2004:655)”.

Campaign money is vital to information transmission because voters are unlikely to gather information on their own. Individuals are seldom pivotal in elections, implying that investing time and effort in learning about candidates will rarely yield tangible benefits for an individual. Campaigns, on the other hand, have an incentive to get information into the hands of voters, as favourable information for a candidate and unfavourable information about an opponent can change voter’s choices. Hence, when campaigns gather, package and disseminate information, the costs of information are borne by those with the strongest incentives to do so. The more resources they have to do this, the more information voters will get. Some may argue that campaigns are often little more than relentless repetition of half-truths and irrelevant facts but notwithstanding, the potential to inform voters in campaigns may be enough to encourage responsiveness. Candidates know that if they fail to take popular policy positions, their rivals will have a good issue on which to spend money and gain votes. The more a rival has to spend, the greater the incentive for a candidate to preemptively take popular stands (which, in turn, means rival candidates will be able to make fewer meaningful issue distinctions and campaigns may be more likely to degenerate into name calling and innuendo, masking the salutary effect of money on responsiveness) (John & Manna, 2000). The above scenario is mostly attributed to developed democracies.

In less developed democracies like Nigeria, campaign finances are not necessarily for the purpose of disseminating information about the policies that a particular candidate may have, but rather to win election by all means. The desire of the moneyed elites to retain power at all cost including adapting the political mechanism to the new conditions in the political sphere is at the root of their abuse of money (Victor, 2015). The phenomenon of money politics is not a new concept in Nigeria. The history of electioneering process in most part of the country, especially after independence, was largely influenced by the exchange of votes for money. This has indeed affected the political space of the continent because money has become a key variable in determining who participates in electoral politics.

In Nigeria, the electioneering processes have become so much monetized to the extent that it is viewed as an investment by the sponsors of electoral candidates. This has equally enhanced the 'investors' (political elites/ godfathers) to pursue selfish monetary benefits and thus politicking has become a marketing avenue where the highest bidders determine, dictate and control the socio – economic and political affairs of the country. It has become a game of the rich maneuvering the electoral behaviour of the poor. This has forsaken politics of ideology and creativity to the extent that political parties and candidates bother not to outline manifestoes while vying for elective posts (Tunde, Lawal & Muhammad, 2015). In Nigerian electoral politics, money drowns votes and voices as 'godfathers' openly confess about shady deals funding or sponsoring elections for 'godsons' and purchasing electoral victory. Albeit, political process requires funding in order to operate, the lavish spending for political excuses in Nigeria is antithetical to democracy and poses serious threat to good governance in the country despite the regulation of electoral finance in the electoral act, its application is an illusion.

Campaign Finance in Nigeria

Campaign Finance is an integral part of Political Finance. The narrowest understanding to which is "money for electioneering" (Pinto-Duschunsky, 2004). It can also be viewed as the use of money or the use of other material resources for political activities. It embodies the sources or means through which political activities are sponsored in a given country. The idea according to Obiorah, (2004) has two broad connotations: (i) money used for electioneering (campaign funds) and (ii), money used for political party expenses (party funds). Since political parties play a crucial part in election campaigns in many parts of the world, and since it is hard to draw a distinct line between the campaign costs of party organizations and their routine expenses, party funds may reasonably be considered "political finance" too. Party funding includes not only campaign expenses but also the costs of maintaining permanent offices, carrying out policy research, and engaging in political education, voter registration, and the other regular functions of parties (Pinto-Duschunsky, 2004).

There is a correlation between the manner through which campaign and party funds are raised and administered and the outcome of the election and even the overall performance of the candidates sponsored by this process when such persons emerge victorious. When funds are raised from questionable sources – godfatherism, nepotism and corruption, there is a tendency that a candidate will owe allegiance to such forces that put him in power. Placing no limitations on the amount which an individual or a corporation can contribute to a political party allows money bags the opportunity to hijack not just the party structure but to also corrupt the whole electioneering process with money, making it difficult for there to exist a level playing ground for candidates. It makes the process very expensive putting candidates in moral jeopardy of stealing public money to offset debts incurred during a very expensive electioneering process. It is a vicious cycle that perpetuates corruption and mal-governance.

In Nigeria today, sponsorship of a political party or candidate is effectively a business investment, which the investor must recoup the moment his candidate gets into the public office. The very peculiar nature of Nigeria's socio-economic environment characterized by hunger and illiteracy make the general public and indeed government agencies susceptible to manipulation by corrupt politicians who take advantage of political finance sufficient to destroy the electoral process. The sponsors of election in Nigeria are usually described as "godfathers". Godfatherism in a broad sense is an ideology which is constructed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to ultimately determine who gets party ticket to run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest (Gambo, 2006). The dilemma associated with this phenomenon is that the perpetrators are no less a people in the society. The absurdity here is that these

godfathers do not share the core defining attributes of God. Political parties lack the capacity to act contrary to the wishes and aspirations of these godfathers because they look up to them to bankroll their campaigns and to use their influences to see their candidates through elections. Electoral politics through godfatherism is viewed as a huge investment opportunity with considerable promise of massive returns and the godfathers may not hesitate to employ whatever means legitimate or illegitimate to actualise their goals. In most cases, godfathers are selfish and philanthropic individuals working for other people (godsons) for exaggerated political recompense (John, 2006). The relationship between the godfather and the godson is not free floating. It is contractual and the contract is sometimes written and even sealed spiritually with an oath or, at the extreme in a shrine. The Uba – Ngige relationship is a typical example of the contract sealed at Okija Shrine in Anambra state. The godfather is the political slave merchant while the godson is the political slave. Their aims and objectives include appointments, stealing, robbery and looting of government coffers. The decision-making process, appointment and contract award is usually manipulated by the godfather (Mbara, 2004). Surprisingly, in electoral contest, certain candidates are ascribed the status of government candidates and at the end of the contest, such persons often emerge as the winners of the election and afterwards, employ anti-democratic means of ensuring that the social ill is perpetuated indefinitely. On this note, it is imperative to look at case study of some States in Nigeria that have experienced godfatherism since the inauguration of the fourth republic in 1999.

In Anambra, for example, the electoral sponsor (godfather), Chief Emeka Ofori, supported Chief Chinwoke Mbadinuju (godson) to “win” the 1999 governorship election. During the administration, the governor was struggling with his electoral sponsor in order to free the state’s resources which diverted his attention from governance. The brawl between the two led to the inability of the administration to deliver dividends of democracy to the extent that they were voted out of office in 2003 governorship elections. In 2003, Mbadinuju was denied ticket but defected to Alliance for Democracy (AD) in which the election was believed to have been rigged in favour of a different godson under the influence of a different godfather (Nash, Shatu & Lere, 2014).

The new godfather was Chris Uba who supported the new godson Chris Ngige under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and manipulated the election results in favour of the godson. Prior to this, the duo had gone to the Okija shrine to sign a covenant of a relationship in which the governor was to continue showing appreciation to godfather. Part of the covenant was that Ngige (the godson) should among other things recognize the fact that God is using Chris Uba to prepare him for the great task ahead through his sponsorship in which case he will never lie, quarrel with him unduly and will take keen interest in the welfare of the Uba’s family; he should also ensure that he cleared in advance all policy routine administrative issues including all contracts, appointments and decisions with Chris Uba before implementation and to obey all instructions from Uba without dispute on any issue (HRW, 2007). With such agreements, Uba secured his access to the first-degree resources controlled by the state as it was established in an undisputable manner.

No sooner had Ngige been sworn in than trouble started over the immediate enforcement of the terms of the mutually accepted agreement (Nash, Shatu & Lere, 2014). Chris Uba wanted to have 10 of his cronies out of the 17 commissioners to be appointed by his godson and also proposed chief secretary and chief of staff for the governor. When the godson declined to grant any of these demands, the godfather demanded for the sum of three billion Naira as compensation for financing campaign of the godson. Ngige felt uncomfortable and therefore reneged perhaps with

the intention of saving the state's resources for the common good of the people of Anambra. Chris Uba fought back by confessing that the governor did not actually win the election. He also confessed that he had been instrumental in falsifying the figures that gave Ngige the electoral victory. Ngige's election was later invalidated by an election petition tribunal in Awka. The verdict of the tribunal was challenged by Ngige at the court of appeal. The appeal court reviewed and upheld the verdict of the tribunal and thereby sending Ngige out of the government house.

The strategy of Uba has been adopted by godfather-patrons in other parts of Nigeria. Thus, in Kwara state, Olusola Saraki adopted the Uba method with the slight difference that at the end of the struggle, it is his biological son who was facilitating his access to state resources through his occupying the seat of governor. In 1999, Olusola Saraki adopted Alhaji Mohamed Lawal as his godson and made him a governor on the platform of the then All Peoples's Party (APP). However, towards the twilight of his time, a fundamental misunderstanding (of fulfilling the covenant) developed between the godson and the godfather. This development led to the cross - carpeting of the godfather to the Peoples's Democratic Party which was then the opposition party in the state in 2003 and adopted Bukola Saraki, his biological son, to be the flag bearer of the party in the state. Mohammed Lawal lost the governorship contest to Bukola Saraki. To show the strength of his clout in the state, Olusola Saraki's daughter was also elected a member of the Senate in 2003 (Nash, Shatu & Lere, 2014).

No sooner had Bukola been sworn in as the governor of the state in 2003 than a battle ensued between the godson and the godfather on the resources of the state which caused division between real biological godson and biological godfather. At the completion of his mandatory second term tenure in 2011, he had established his own empire based on the cold war between him and his father. Thus he solidified his position at the demise of His father on the 14th November, 2012. It was more or less a monarchical system of administration where his godson a real biological son inherited his position as the godfather of Kwara state politics. In the 2011 governorship election, Dr Bukola Saraki the new godfather, adopted Alhaji Abdulfatah Ahmed godson and eventually won the governorship contest. The two are still in good terms perhaps because the godson honoured the agreement.

Another example is Oyo State. Chief Lamidi Adedibu was widely known as the father of Ibadan politics and accepted to play the role of godfather to Lam Adesina in 1999 governorship election. Chief Lamidi Adedibu used his wealth of experience to rig the election which led to the electoral victory of Lam Adesina as the governor of the state under the platform of Alliance for Democracy (AD) between 1999 and 2003. Regan (2005) observed that Adesina the godson expended the greater part of his time as the governor slugging it out with his estranged godfather who felt short changed by his godson. As a result, the godson was denied second term in the 2003 governorship election. Chief Adedibu cross - carpeted to People's Democratic Party and adopted Senator Rasheed Ladoja as the new godson. As soon as Ladoja was also sworn in, he reneged on the agreement of giving free access to Adedibu to state resources. The disagreement culminated into the impeachment of Ladoja who had clearly become a political orphan and replaced by his deputy (Adebayo Alao Akala). Chief Adedibu claimed that he was not getting enough returns from his investment and blames this on his godson's mysterious gluttony. The political career of the godfather of Ibadan politics came to stand still after his sudden demise.

In Kano also, it is almost similar. Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso was inaugurated as the governor of the state with Abdullahi Umar Ganduje as his deputy in 1999. By 2003, they were voted out of office and Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau became the governor. Shekarau served for two consecutive terms in office. At the expiration of his second tenure in 2011, Kwankwaso and Ganduje were reelected

for a second tenure under the PDP platform. Towards the end of their tenure, the governor decamped to the new political party the All Progressives Congress (APC). It was reported that Kwankwaso used the influence of the state's resources and assumed the status of a godfather within the state politics. As a result, Kwankwaso contested for the seat of his Senatorial District and also ensured that Ganduje (his deputy) was nominated to contest for the governorship position and both won. No sooner had Abdullahi Umar Ganduje been inaugurated as the governor in 2015 than trouble began with the estranged godfather. The godson reneged from fulfilling the covenant of remaining loyal to the orders of his godfather. This development led to emergence of two antagonistic political ideologies within the same political party in the state. There is '*kwankwasiyya Amana*' and '*Gandujiyya Aqeeda*' under the leadership of Rabi'u Kwankwaso the godfather and Umar Ganduje the godson respectively.

On a general note, it could be argued that the type of politics operated in Nigeria is a rentier one. Rentier politics in Nigeria has been characterized over the years by the dominance of 'electoral machines' controlled by political entrepreneurs comprising largely of wealthy former military personnel and their civilian business cronies. Most of the political parties in Nigerian politics today are little more than grand agglomerations of the respective electoral 'machines' of the leading political financiers. Many Nigerian politicians are 'sponsored' by local and regional power brokers cum political entrepreneurs who finance their campaigns for public office. The 'sponsorship' is effectively a business transaction in which the patron recovers the 'investment' in the form of public works and procurement of contracts, prebendal appointments of cronies to public offices and other forms of prebendal activities by the 'client' politician on assuming public office. In some cases where the patron and client failed to define with sufficient precision, the dimensions of the return on investment or the client refuses at delivering per the agreed terms, the resultant effect may lead to mass violence and political destabilization.

During the 1998-99 transition following the sudden death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998, 'political entrepreneurs' comprising ex-military officers and their civilian business cronies effectively seized control of the Nigerian political scene. The military regimes led by Generals Ibrahim Babangida (1985-93), Sani Abacha (1993-98) and Abubakar (1998-99) were widely perceived as the most corrupt and despotic in all of Nigeria's history (Maier, 2000). Nigeria under these three Heads of State was routinely described by scholars of African politics as a prebendal or patrimonial state. Public office and government patronage became 'the only order of the day'. Retiring military officers deployed the massive wealth generated from the proceeds of grand corruption to creating and financing the political networks that formed the nuclei of several of the political associations that sought registration as political parties. The 1998-99 electoral campaign which brought the government led by Olusegun Obasanjo to power in May 1999 was largely financed by former military officer-political entrepreneurs; deploying their massive financial resources, they were able to install ex-military officers and their civilian business cronies in control of the largest political parties and in high federal and state public offices (Obiorah, 2004).

In the subsequent electoral campaigns, political parties in the country rely heavily on the State and the influential individuals to finance their electoral campaigns. Political movements representing the interests of the poor and the disadvantaged that could have served to moderate the influence of the dominant political parties had been systematically excluded from participation in the political arena by a combination of legal instruments and their relative paucity of resources as compared with the vast financial resources available to the dominant parties. A net result is the disempowerment of the generality of the Nigerian people. The dominance of

unrepresentative 'machine' parties alienates the electorate and prevents the evolution of accountable governance in Nigeria. Some of the factors that exacerbate the exclusion of alternative parties and enhance the disproportionate influence of political entrepreneurs thereby reinforcing the popular disempowerment include electoral regulations that imposed cumbersome financial burdens on political movements seeking to participate in electoral politics in the absence of an effective system to regulate political finance. Nigeria's history of political instability, exacerbated by political mobilization on ethnic, religious and sectarian lines, has led successive governments to impose legal and administrative guidelines for political party formation, registration and operation. These guidelines which ostensibly seek to avoid the establishment of parties on sectarian, ethnic or geographical bases and to encourage the creation of political alliances bridging regional, ethnic and sectarian divides effectively imposed cumbersome financial obligations on citizens wishing to form and register political parties.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which has among its mandates the responsibility of monitoring campaign financing is faced with several constraints on its ability to effectively control the activities and operations of the godfathers. The Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) provides the current legal and institutional framework for the conduct of elections in the country. The Act empowers INEC to regulate sources and nature of funding for political campaigns in Nigeria. Under section 91 of the Act, the maximum election expenses to be incurred by a candidate in a presidential election should not exceed one Billion Naira. Similar ceilings are set for governorship election at N200 Million, while elections to the Senate and House of Representatives are not to exceed N40 Million and N20 Million respectively. From the provisions of the Act, it could be deduced that there are several loopholes which can inhibit effective oversight of political parties by the election management body. For instance, as Victor (2015) rightly argued, there seems to be no limitation on the contributions that could be made. The Act in section 91(9) merely states that "No individual or other entity shall donate more than one million naira (1, 000, 000) to any candidate", while it is an offence for political parties to receive funds from other countries in line with section 88 (b). However, there is no such provision to check candidates. Also, section 91(8,c) excludes expenses by political parties (in relation to candidates) from the candidate's spending limits. This makes the spending limits meaningless as unlimited funds could be channeled through political parties rather than through individual candidates. Another issue worthy of note is the long period provided for in the Act for political parties to submit financial reports on election expenses. The period of six months is too long for political parties to address issues of transparency and accountability in campaign finance.

Moreover, it is the responsibility of INEC to publish the annual reports from the activities of political parties and that political parties too have to publish their expense reports. However, it is not clear in the Act if the reports on contributions will be made public. There are also other provisions in the Act that are quite ambiguous. For instance, there is no clear provision on the deadline for the submission of annual financial reports. Also, section 92 (2) states that "election expenses incurred by a political party... shall be determined by the commission in consultation with the political parties". It is not clear if this provision refers to 'limit' to such expenses. The existence of such limits is indicated in Section 92 (6) Sections 93 (1) and 93 (3) which seem to give contradictory information on anonymous donations. On one hand, political parties must not receive any anonymous contributions 'from any source whatsoever'. On the other hand, political parties shall not accept contributions exceeding 100, 000 Naira 'unless it can identify the sources to the Commission'. However, due to the lack of institutional capacity of the electoral umpire, political parties tend to disobey such provision.

Closely related to the above are the provisions in Sections 92(7) and 93 (2b) which show the contradictory instructions on the information that parties must keep about contributors. Section 93 (2b) states that parties must keep record of the name and address of all who contribute more than one million Naira. However, section 92(7) stipulates that parties must report to the commission the names, address and occupation of its contributors without stating any threshold for such disclosure. The pertinent question is whether political parties have the capacity of submitting information to the Commission on record they do not have as they do not always keep proper record of campaign finance.

The removal of public funding for political parties is one of the significant changes in the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) with regard to provision on political finance. In Nigeria, public funding was abolished in 1983 and 1993, but reintroduced with the return of civil rule in 1999 (Victor, 2015). Until the judicial pronouncement by the Federal High Court in 2006 that compelled INEC to distribute all the subventions to all the political parties equally, the practice was to distribute most of the funds in proportion to the votes that each received in elections, a practice that was believed to be promoting an unequal competitive environment and which was to the disadvantage of the smaller parties in opposition, most of which were generally poor in financial capacity.

The provision of public funding to political parties and/or candidates has been justified on the claim that provision of 'clean' money by government to political actors reduces the prospect of dependence on sponsors that may want to use their resources to advance selfish interests. In the developed democracies like US and France, the practice has been used as a way of checking political corruption that is associated with party funding and the dependence on private sponsorship. With state funding, political parties are made to become more responsible and accountable to the election regulators on their finances including such issues as disclosure and timely reporting on election expenses. Arguably, public funding is becoming increasingly popular among emerging democracies as a strategy for ensuring the survival of relatively young political parties without adequate resources to function well. The argument in support of the withdrawal of state funding is that political parties will be freed from state's interference in their affairs, and aside need to become self-financing organisations and be more accountable to the people whose contributions and donations would be the main source of their funding.

Section 91 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) sets the spending limit thresholds for candidates running for various government offices, limit on campaign contributions and donations. The rationale behind this is the assumption that candidates normally spend more than their parties on their electioneering campaign and other related activities. Significant part of candidate's expenses do take the form of third party spending in the form of donations, contributions and media sponsorship by 'committee of friends' and associates. This poses a great challenge for both INEC and State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) that do not have power to gather data and information on expenses of candidates under the existing legal regime. Worst still, the electoral law has not made candidates answerable for any breach of political finance regulations. It is worth noting that Section 225(2) of the 1999 Constitution specifically requires political parties to disclose their sources of funds and their manner of expenditures. It is the political parties and not the candidates that are answerable under the present legal regime. Thus, some forms of illicit use of money persist but they are not violations under the electoral law. In this circumstance, it is almost impossible for INEC to prosecute candidates in court for violating political finance regulations using the provisions of Section 150 (2) of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended).

Besides, the high costs associated with compliance with the guidelines effectively bar the vast majority of Nigerians from participating in politics. Political parties are formed and operated mostly by those Nigerians who possess or have access to the enormous funds required to comply with the guidelines. This in turn leads to the creation of political parties based mostly on alliances of convenience between wealthy 'political entrepreneurs' rather than political parties based on 'ideology' or political platforms. Parties and candidates finance their activities and campaigns from funds provided by party godfathers and political entrepreneurs in absolute secrecy. The Nigerian public has no information as to which entrepreneur has provided funds to any political party or candidate. This type of politics contributes to lack of accountable governance because political leaders are primarily beholden to the party financiers and their electoral machines rather than the electorate. The aggregate result of which is distortions in Nigeria's quest for effective governance.

What is the 'Act' (Corruption)?

Nigeria is the most populous country and supposedly the leading democracy in Africa. For years, it has been struggling to decrease unemployment, income inequality and underdevelopment in general which is widely accepted that misappropriation of public funds and assets by corrupt elites has been a major cause of underdevelopment in the country (Global Witness, 2012). The 'act' as used in this context connotes 'corruption' and has been defined differently by scholars of different orientations. It refers to those activities in which public officials, bureaucrats, legislators, and politicians use powers delegated to them by the public to further their own interests at the expense of the common good (Jain, 2001). It could also be conceived as the improper use of influence in order to gain undue personal or group advantage (Ogundiya, 2009). It is an act undertaken with the intent of extracting personal or private rewards against the interest of the state. Such an act could be in form of theft, embezzlement of funds, nepotism and the abuse of public authority for personal gain.

Nigeria is included in the main International Corruption Assessments, including the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index and the Global Corruption Barometer, as well as the World Bank business surveys. For instance, the Worldwide Governance Indicator regarding control of corruption, which ranges from 0 (lowest control of corruption) to 100 (highest control of corruption), shows that the levels of corruption in Nigeria had remained alarmingly high during the past years. The country scored just 11 on control of corruption in 2012, and little significant variation can be seen since the first assessment in 1996, when Nigeria scored approximately 9 and still below the sub-Saharan African average of 30 in 2013 (Forum, 2014).

Similarly, Nigeria scores poorly on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. In the 2014 assessment the country gained two points compared to 2013, receiving a score of 27 on a scale from 0 (most corrupt) to 100 (least corrupt). With this score, Nigeria ranks among the 38 most corrupt countries in the world. It is ranked 136 out of 175 countries both in 2014 and 2015. It also ranked 136 out of 176 and 148 out of 180 in 2016 and 2017 respectively. (Transparency-International, 2017). These reports captured Nigeria as a corrupt state and expectedly would continue to be downfall in all sectors of development by this dastard and callous act.

Dimensions of the 'Act'

Corruption in Nigeria manifests itself in different forms and at different levels of society. Amundsen (2010) provides a useful description of the dimensions/ types of corruption in Nigeria. According to him, corruption in Nigeria serves two main purposes: (i) to extract rents from the

state, which includes rent-seeking behaviour in the form of embezzlement, abuse of power, bribery, nepotism and cronyism among other; and (ii) to preserve power, that is, to ensure that an individual maintains his/her position of power or gains access to such a position through activities such as electoral corruption, judicial corruption or the distribution of public jobs.

Moreover, corruption has many dimensions ranging from political, socio-cultural, economic, administrative, legal, environmental and technological among others. For the purpose of this article, emphasis will be given to the 'Act' as it relates to Elections, Governance, Security and Stability of Nigeria.

The 'Act' and Elections in Nigeria

Democracy is about participation and representation. Participation is the extent to which individual members of society take part or get involved in the political activities of their societies. Representation on the other hand, refers to the process by which people get chosen to act in the interest of the community or sectors thereof (Olarinmoye, 2008). Contemporarily, where the dominant form of democracy is representative democracy, individuals in the society participate and express their political values through the process of election. Political parties play a crucial role in this regard because they are the mechanisms for ensuring citizen participation and representation in public policy decision making (Agbaje, 2005). Electoral corruption in Nigeria seems to begin with the activities of political parties ranging from irregularities in party funding and to selection of candidates. Available evidences point to the existence of political corruption through irregularities in political party financing. Electoral laws in Nigeria do include some regulations regarding campaign financing. For instance, it bans anonymous donations to political parties, limits donations to individual candidates, prohibits abuse of state resources and vote-buying, and requires political parties to report their income and expenditures (Agbaje, 2005). However, in practice, studies have shown that the laws are not enforced and several irregularities seem to have taken place in past elections as EU Observers rightly observed in the 2015 general elections:

cases of abuse of federal and state government resources, biased policing as well as breaches of campaign regulations such as inducement of voters. Allegations were made of civil service salaries, sometimes unpaid for several months, being siphoned off for party campaign activities. Following the election, misappropriation of large sums of campaign money by party supporters caused further controversy (EU EOM 2015, as cited in IDEA, 2016: 7).

This is a clear instance in which public resources that are meant to cater for their wellbeing are often diverted for use in political campaigns, giving incumbents a huge advantage. Political parties do even exceed their spending limits without any consequence. With regard to the selection of candidates, in spite of the rule obliging political parties to disclose their list of registered candidates beforehand, primaries are still vulnerable to corruption due to the election oversight body's limited legal authority over internal party matters (Agbaje, 2005). The "godfather" syndrome appears to be common in Nigerian politics. Political godfathers are defined as "men who have the power personally to determine who gets nominated and who wins (an election) in a state" (Albert, 2005, as cited in U4 Expert Answer, 2014: 9).

The term is linked to patron-client relationships – godfathers often use their influence (and sometimes violence) to manipulate the rest of the society. They basically dictate who should and shouldn't run for office under which terms, imposing challenges to public participation and democracy in general. The key role of godfathers in facilitating the 'Act' as keenly observed by

Olarinmoye, (2008: 69) is that they act as brokers between political parties and the voting public. They have the intuitive knowledge of the structure of the electorates in what appeals and what incentives are most appropriate to them. It is this knowledge that enables the godfather engage in such acts as; compilation of fictitious names on voters' register, illegal compilation of separate voters' list, illegal printing of voter's cards, illegal possession of ballot boxes and host of other irregularities including the stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers.

In addition, a godfather also acts as a patron who deploys his knowledge and controls the structure of voting public to capture the party machinery for personal use (Ibrahim, 2006). With this control, he becomes the sponsor of the politician and not just a broker. He uses his control of party machinery to impose his clients as candidates for elective office and ensures their victory through activities which have been characterized as electoral corruption. Such activities as vividly captured by Olarinmoye (2008:71) include:

- i. Making a declaration that those entitled to vote must support one candidate and other aspirants must withdraw;
- ii. Engaging in zoning and other procedures that exclude unwanted candidates by moving the party zone out of the seat or position in question to an area where the excluded candidate is not local;
- iii. Deploying violence by thugs or security personnel against candidates who oppose the godfather protégés;
- iv. Money, a significant factor in party primaries, is used to bribe officials and induce voters to support particular candidates. Since the godfather generally has more money than the 'independent' candidates, many of the latter are eliminated because they cannot match his spending;
- v. What Nigerians call "results by declaration": an aspirant wins a nomination or election, but polling officials disregard the results.

To this end therefore, it is evident that corruption and its influence on elections in Nigeria have been significant challenges, impacting the democratic process and the overall credibility of electoral outcomes. Addressing it in elections in Nigeria requires comprehensive efforts, including strengthening electoral institutions, ensuring the independence of the electoral process, and promoting civic education to enhance public awareness. It's essential to foster a political environment where electoral outcomes reflect the genuine will of the people rather than the influence of corrupt practices

Conclusion and Recommendations

Corruption in the Nigerian electioneering process has become a topical issue. Its dimensions are many. These include vote buying, abuse of state resources, failure by political parties and candidates to comply with regulations (often with impunity) and lack of effective enforcement stand out as the major problems. While legal reform is needed in the country, the main problem, and hence the main focus for effective solutions, lies on the legislative side and more on practical activities by stakeholders such as political actors, public oversight bodies and civil society groups. In essence, campaign finance needs a proper regulation. The outrageous spending on election during campaign and mobilization of supporters by majority of the contestants need to be regulated. The government through the electoral umpire should ensure compliance with the electoral act and ready to enforce disciplinary action on the violator.

Effective legal and institutional frameworks for regulating political party financing, through which political parties and candidates for political office are compelled to declare their funding sources, and election expenses need to be adequate and effective. Also, the removal of government subventions from political parties may have made enforcement more difficult for INEC. Before now, the withdrawal of subsidy from erring political parties by INEC was one of the ways of ensuring compliance with electoral rule and regulations including the disclosure requirements and other political finance regulations. In the past, INEC had threatened to deny public fund to any political party that does not follow the established rules. Under the 2010 Electoral Act that abrogates subsidy to parties, it may be difficult for INEC to enforce compliance.

Unregulated use of money in politics promotes 'godfatherism' and other associated fraudulent electoral activities including the intimidation of political opponents and electoral violence. Stakeholders in the electoral process should work to ensure effective implementation of the new laws to ensure control of frauds and political finance related corruption, promote active and efficient political parties, and ensure openness and transparency in the electoral process. In addition to ensuring the enforcement of ceiling as stipulated in the relevant provisions, it is recommended that effective collaboration of all stakeholders be encouraged to ensure disclosure of sources of party/campaign financing. Easy accessibility to basic information as to who gives whom and for what purpose should be guaranteed.

Above all, there is the need for government to have a multi-track approach which entails strengthening the capacity of the election management bodies in the country and other relevant institutions and agencies such as the judiciary, EFCC, ICPC, police and other security Agencies. There is also the need for increased civic and voter education for the population by relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the INEC.

In conclusion, as the country rides on its anti-corruption crusade at all levels, the issue of how political parties and their candidates acquire and use money cannot be ignored. Effective monitoring of party funding and compliance with laws and regulations is possible but with the right political will. The political leadership needs to display effective political will that could ensure a corrupt electoral process within the country.

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