

Ethnicisation of corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to assess the ethnicisation of corruption in Nigeria. This paper examines the role of ethnicity in promoting corruption, the impact of ethnicity on corruption and the challenge it poses for its combat.

Design/methodology/approach – The study uses descriptive analysis and evidence-based research.

Findings – The paper found evidence that corruption was deeply rooted in various ethnic groups that people Nigeria, and this is the major factor militating against measures to combat it. The findings are relevant for understanding the dynamics of corruption and strategies to combat it.

Originality/value – The paper's uniqueness is its departure from the overly researched problems, consequences and causes of corruption to a new area of linking ethnicity to the virulent nature of corruption in Nigeria. It shows a number of evidences of ethnic dimension to corruption escalation in the country.

Keywords Development, Governance, Corruption, Ethnic groups, Dimension, Ethnicisation

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction and the problem

Corruption seems to be a universal phenomenon regardless of geography and forms of government (Warf, 2017). But what perhaps varies are the severity and consequences (Warf, 2017). As it is found in poor countries, its semblance is noticeable in rich countries as well. It is a phenomenon that defies potency of law and attacks moral sense and decency of society (Lumumba, 2014; Nduku, 2014; Warf, 2017). One of the challenges of human race is corruption. It is a universal threat, causing want in the midst of plenty (Nigeria), rendering government incapable of delivering services (Somalia), reducing funding for public budget and provision of essential services (Ethiopia), instigating political instability (Kenya), prolonging conflict (Angola) and encouraging patronage system through “militarised kleptocracies” (Sudan and South Sudan) (Kristof, 2015; Malaquias, 2001; Nduku, 2014; Warf, 2017). Scholars are in consensus that in the case of Africa, the severity and pervasiveness of corruption are incomparable to anywhere in the world (Jones, 2006; Lawal, 2007; Lawson, 2009; Manga, 1999; Mbaku, 2008).

Africa is vulnerable to excruciating corruption causing retarded growth, endemic poverty and illiteracy (Matti, 2010; Mwangi, 2008; Plummer, 2012; Tangri and Mwenda, 2006). Transparency International (TI) (2018) painted a gloomy picture of deleterious effects of corruption on the African continent. According to the TI (2018), about 80% of Africans live on less than \$2 a day, while \$50bn in asset is being stolen from Africa on yearly basis, and 75 million people in Africa had had to pay bribes in 2016 (TI, 2018). This money could be used for provision of jobs and critical social services. This perhaps explains the pervasive lack of development being experienced in almost all parts of Africa, from Zimbabwe to Libya. Corruption reinforces and perpetuates poverty and want. Africa presents a hapless situation in terms of fighting the scourge (Hanson, 2009; TI, 2018). Accounts of corruption in



Africa range from one country to another. This is validated by the perception accounts of corruption in a survey conducted by the Pew Charitable Trust in 2014. The survey reveals that 39% of Egyptians perceive corruption as the most serious problem, while 85, 77, 86, 66, 70, 90, 89 and 87% in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia and Uganda, respectively, perceive corruption as the most important problem affecting the development aspirations of their various countries (Pew Charitable Trust, 2014).

The view of most scholars is that corruption is an endemic problem (Arowolo and Akinola, 2018; Egharevba and Chiazor, 2012; Hoffmann and Patel, 2017; Ifidon, 1996; Kaufmann, 2001; Ladipo, 2002; Lipset and Lenz, 2000; Ogbeidi, 2012; Ogundiya, 2009; Omorotionmwan, 2017; Osaghae, 1988). But, as reinforced by Ogundiya (2009), Omorotionmwan (2017) and Osaghae (1988), the foundation of official corruption in Nigeria was laid through colonialism. According to them, the importation of modern rules on inter-ethnic political relationships arising from colonial imperialism was a foundation of official corruption in Nigeria, as the colonial contraption was designed to facilitate kleptocratic behaviour. Their theses were supported by the works of Arowolo and Olaniyan (2018), Egharevba and Chiazor (2012), Ogbeidi (2012) and Ifidon (1996), who insisted that the commonly held view during the colonial days was that the colonial government's property was not "our" property. Thus, vandalism and looting of public property was not seen as a crime against society. This public perception has come to define the more recent disregard for public property and lack of public trust and concern for public goods as a collective national property (Omorotionmwan, 2017; Ogundiya, 2009; Ifidon, 1996; Osaghae, 1988).

While the literature is replete with causes, forms and effects of corruption, more scholarly contributions to the ethnic dimension of corruption in Nigeria are expedient. Hence, instead of the rhetoric of the overly researched problems areas of corruption, this article examines the role of ethnicity in promoting corruption; the impact of ethnicity on corruption and the challenge it poses for its combat. If corruption is to be alleviated, it must be understood, interrogated and tackled from ethnic point of view. This is because ethnic groups in Nigeria have been accused of promoting corruption through the support they give to members of their groups accused of corruption. This is a new problem area of corruption that needs to be interrogated. The study therefore examines ethnicisation of corruption in Nigeria.

The concept and context of corruption in Nigeria

There is no doubt that corruption in Nigeria has become pervasive and does not exclude any area of her national life (Arowolo and Olaniyan, 2018; Ladipo, 2002; NBS, 2017). This gloomy nature of corruption in Nigeria makes it expedient to really conceptualise and contextualise corruption for the purpose of coming to grips with the salient issues that are raised hereafter. What is corruption? Corruption as a concept seems difficult to define. But it is agreed that the moral implication of corruption is derived from its Latin word: *corrumpere*, which means to lose value or to deprave (Tenamwenye, 2014; Warf, 2017). Arising from Latin interpretation, corruption can be seen as an act of dishonesty, involving perversion of rules for private gain. Ladipo (2002) defines corruption as the misuse of office for unofficial ends. He adds that, the act is not only limited to bribery but also include extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, the use of "speed up" (money paid to government officials to speed up their consideration of a business matter falling within their jurisdiction) and embezzlement.

Transparency International (2015) and the World Bank (2015) define corruption as the use or misuse of entrusted power for private gain. According to Transparency International (2015), corruption takes many forms, from bribes to extortion to patronage. Corruption flourishes where there are few or weak institutional checks on power; where

decision-making is obscure; where civil society is weak and is itself overwhelmed by perversion of the norms; and where poverty is widespread. Corruption has real political, economic and social costs. It is an obstacle to democracy and the rule of law. It keeps and makes countries poor because it diverts public funds and drives away foreign investment (TI, 2015; World Bank, 2015). The manifestation of endemic corrupt practices causes citizens' apathy and mutual distrust between the government and the governed.

Lipset and Lenz (2000) define corruption as an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means. Kaufmann (2001) avers that corruption is the abuse of public power for private benefit. Operationalising corruption, Kaufmann (2001) further conceives acts of corruption to include bribery and extortions, which necessarily involve at least two parties and other malfeasances that a public official cannot carry out alone including fraud and embezzlement. According to him, corruption manifests in governmental activities through the "appropriation of public assets for private use and embezzlement of public funds by politicians and high-level officials". In Africa, causes of corruption vary depending on the local cultures and systems of government. But generally speaking, scholars are in agreement on the following as some of the chief causes or promoting factors of corruption. They include negative colonial legacy, poor leadership, greed and selfishness, closed or authoritarianism, clientelism and patronage system, weak institutions of government, centralised state structure, lack of political will and lack of accountability and transparency in government (Lumumba, 2014; Masabo, 2014; Waithim and Burns, 2014).

According to Sharma *et al.* (2012), corruption has become highly rampant and permeates in every sphere of state and society. They insisted that corruption in political and administrative arena hindered equity, efficiency, effectiveness, economy and ethics. Osinbajo (2017b) opines that corruption has damaged the image of Nigeria and is a hindrance to the realisation of democratic, transparent and accountable government. According to him, it has deteriorated the polity of Nigeria, as it has percolated both the vertical and horizontal political structures of Nigeria, namely, executive, judiciary and legislature, as well as federal, state and local governments. Corruption as used in this study is the abuse of public office, trust or authority by conferring undue benefits (economic, political, administrative and social) on oneself or a third party contrary to statutory provisions and code of ethics for public servants such as offering and or collecting bribes, inflation of contract sum, over invoicing of supplies, tampering with payment vouchers, nepotism, unofficial use of public assets, electoral malpractices and so on (Arowolo and Akinola, 2018).

The level of corruption in Nigeria can be mirrored through the damning corruption survey report released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), which unraveled the pervasive nature of corruption in the country. In the report, it is revealed that corruption in Nigeria cuts across every segment of her national life; it is the third most important problem after high cost of living and unemployment, the two being the consequences of corruption itself. In effect therefore, corruption is the most important problem currently facing Nigeria (NBS, 2017). According to the survey entitled "corruption in Nigeria: bribery: public experience and response", the 2017 National Corruption Survey states that 46.4% of Nigerian citizens paid bribes to police officers, 33% paid bribes to prosecutors, 31.5% paid bribes to judges and magistrates and 26.5% paid bribes to custom officers (NBS, 2017). This is alarming and calls for further scholarly and scientific interrogations. This piece is one of such responses to the call, whose analysis in the next section is done through theoretical appreciation.

Theoretical analysis of corruption in Nigeria

Central to the theoretical analysis of endemic corruption in Nigeria is the two publics postulation of Ekeh (1975, 1985). This is correct to the extent that the theory of two publics

as developed by Peter Eke has expressive analytical underpinning central to the understanding of ethnic dimension of pervasive corruption in Nigeria. More important to the choice of the two publics theory is its emphasis on the linkage of virulent nature of corruption in Nigeria with the nature of her ethnic composition rooted in the colonial amalgamation of varying tendencies, which were hitherto independent of one another with different socio-cultural backgrounds. This theory provides explicit explanations for the ethnic promotion of corruption in Nigeria.

One of the debilitating effects of colonialism, according to Ekeh (1975, 1985), was the two public realms, namely, the primordial and civic public realms, which related differently with the private realm in terms of morality. As postulated by Ekeh (1975, 1985), Nigeria's case is pathetic as it is a victim of conflicting loyalty: amoral civic public realm and moral primordial public realm. Citizens expect rights from the state but are not always inclined to expend duties for the state but for the native sector. This tragedy, as explained by Ogundiya (2009), forms the basis of an "amoral civic public realm" and "moral primordial public realm". The concept of "amoral civic public realm" explains a situation, where citizens perceive the state as a product of exploitative colonial rule and therefore illegitimate with no moral linkages with the private realm, whereas "moral primordial public realm" is a public perception of the primordial space as legitimate and to which absolute patriotism should be accorded. It was an amoral public realm in which cheating the system was considered a patriotic duty (Ifidon, 1996, p. 102). As the two actors operate in the two realms, conflict of loyalty pervades and defines the relationship, and this, more often than not, results in a situation where the state apparatus is used to fatten the nest of the primordial public, thereby legitimising corruption in the civic public space (Ogundiya, 2009; Osaghae, 1988).

The central kernel of Ekeh's thesis is likened to the popular aphorism "robbing Peter to pay Paul" syndrome, the end-result of which is corruption: pilfering of public patrimony from the civic public and the bribery regime between the consumers and providers of social services in the civic public space (Ekeh, 1975). The strengthening of primordial public space from the proceeds of the vandalisation of common patrimony of civic public space in the sense of using the loots from the civic public to engender socio-economic development of the primordial public, as opined by Ekeh (1975, 1985), has been contested by emerging literatures (Ogundiya, 2009; Osaghae, 1988; Ifidon, 1996). As argued by Ifidon (1996) and Osaghae (1988), the primordial public is a victim of stolen state wealth as the trio of the gun wielders (the military), the pen-wielders (the bureaucratic elite) and the power-wielders (the political class), in the case of Nigeria, have subjected the country to conspiratorial looting, which has pauperised members of the primordial public. According to Ifidon (1996) and Ogundiya (2009), the gun-wielders, pen-wielders and power-wielders engaged in a grand deception and manipulation of the primordial public to vandalise state resources.

It is important to note, as the study conducted by Hoffmann and Patel (2017) has revealed, that the robbery in the civic public was not meant, neither is it currently used, for the purpose of strengthening the primordial public but rather further pauperise it. In fact, according to Amadi and Ekeke (2014), recent revelation of financial crimes suggests that most of the stolen state wealth has been laundered abroad by this group of elites to acquire estates for themselves, their immediate families and their cronies. Although, as Ekeh (1975) and Ogundiya (2009) have documented, some of the stolen wealth may trickle down to the primordial public in the process, in actual fact, such may be too small to make any significant impact on the social, economic and political development of the primordial public. Ironically, however, as Ogbeidi (2012) and Osinbajo (2017a) have observed, the primordial public, which suffers most from the recklessness of its few privileged members, has also been found to be ignorantly defending their oppressors in the name of ethnic

identity and religious affinity. According to [Osinbajo \(2017a\)](#), the alleged looters have found ethnic affiliation as a veritable filip for their corrupt enrichment. This, according to [Arowolo and Akinola \(2018\)](#), is a case of whipping ethnic sentiments to obliterate corrupt allegations against them. Fundamentally, [Adenuga and Omowal \(2014\)](#) and [Aiyede et al. \(2011\)](#) have contended that religion is a tool to play ethnic card in Nigeria because, as opined by [Akanji \(2010\)](#), [Eluu \(2015\)](#) and [Yagboyaju \(2017\)](#), the preponderance of people in the North are Muslims and those in the south are Christians, thus corrupt leaders whip religious sentiment to evade punishment depending on the part of the country they belong.

Ethnicisation of corruption and evidence of pandemic corruption in Nigeria

This study argues that corruption is fuelled by and is a derivative of the nature of ethnic composition in Nigeria. This is supported by the submissions of [Hoffmann and Patel \(2017\)](#), [Ogbeidi \(2012\)](#) and [Ogundiya \(2009\)](#) when they averred that corruption in Nigeria was rooted in ethnicity. This explains the pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria as manifested in the consistent rating of the country as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Nigeria was ranked 121 in 2008; 130 in 2009; 134 in 2010; 143 in 2011; 139 in 2012; 144 in 2013; 136 in 2014; and 136 in 2015 ([TI, 2017](#)). In 2017, Nigeria was again ranked Nigeria low in its 2017 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) as she was ranked 148th position out of 180 countries pooled. The country, according to the CPI, scored 28 out of 100, a figure lower than the average in the sub-Saharan region. CPI score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as experienced by business people and analysts and ranges between 100 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt). In the 2016 rankings, Nigeria scored 28; 25 in 2015; 27 in 2014; 25 in 2013 and 27 in 2012 ([TI, 2017](#)).

The system of ethnicity and the knit of social ties make corrupt practices difficult to combat. According to [Amaeshi \(2017\)](#), [Asuzu \(2018\)](#), [Ogundiya \(2009\)](#) and [Osaghae \(1988\)](#), these ethnic relationships were not entrenched in endemic corruption before the advent of colonialism. They contended that the presence of imperial enterprise, purposed on the milking of the natural endowments of the South by the North and its attendant forced marriage of nationhood of varying tendencies, where natural boundaries – a mark of social identity and cultural homogeneity – were discarded and replaced by artificial balkanisations, made the imposed contraption an abstraction of some sort to which there were disloyalty and alienations ([Amaeshi, 2017](#); [Asuzu, 2018](#); [Ogundiya, 2009](#); [Osaghae, 1988](#)). The scholars are in agreement that Nigeria is a melting pot in which ethnic variations with heterogenic tendencies had to cohabit and co-exist. According to them, the idea behind amalgamation did not originate from the people themselves, and there was ethnic loyalty in place of national patriotism. This accounts for and explains the ethnic competition for national resources in Nigeria ([Amaeshi, 2017](#); [Asuzu, 2018](#); [Ogundiya, 2009](#); [Osaghae, 1988](#)).

This scenario also played out in Kenya ([Waithim and Burns, 2014](#)) and Tanzania ([Masabo, 2014](#)). In Tanzania for instance, corruption is said to be part of the public service culture, and it is seen as a normal thing to pay or receive bribes and, as a matter of fact, is part of people's life ([Masabo, 2014](#)). This is also the case in Kenya, where corruption has become a tool for ethnic competition ([Waithim and Burns, 2014](#)). The colonial distortions of social settings and the establishment of pilfering system from where the resources of the *peripheral* are taken to the *metropole* actually marked the beginning of vandalisation of national resources and the subjection of Africa to ethnic assault ([Amaeshi, 2017](#); [Asuzu, 2018](#); [Masabo, 2014](#); [Waithim and Burns, 2014](#)).

There have been spirited efforts to share from the national cake – a term used in Nigeria to mean national resources – among the ethnic groups that people Nigeria. Corruption, to ethnic groups, is a case of ethnic struggle for national resources. This is what the study

refers to as ethnicisation of corruption. According to [Osinbajo \(2017a\)](#), the Nigerian system is deeply infested with corruption. This is validated in the manner by which graft has been ethnicised. Allegation of corruption against any member of any ethnic group is passionately defended by the group with the belief that a member that stole from the common patrimony has just retrieved the share of its own ethnic nationality and for the benefit of the group. Nigerian state now becomes a victim of ethnic pillage ([Osinbajo, 2017a, 2017b](#)). This is the synopsis of the reckless vandalisation of the Nigerian national wealth and the economic strangulation to which she has been continuously subjected over the past four decades ([Nnochiri, 2018](#)). The endemic and pandemic corruption in Nigeria therefore is a function of ethnic enmeshment in graft and can be understood and interrogated from this perspective.

Few cases of ethnicisation of corruption will help drive home this point. A case of non-declaration of asset was brought against the immediate-past Chief Justice of Nigeria, Walter Nkanu Onoghen. He was arraigned on Monday, January 14, 2019 before the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) on a six-count charge bordering on non-declaration of his assets as mandated by the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) for all public officers ([Okakwu and Ogundipe, 2019](#)). According to the charges, he failed to declare his domiciliary accounts which comprised different denominations, including American Dollar Account, Pound Sterling Account and Euro Account ([Enumah, 2019](#)). However, in what looks like ethnic support, the south-south Governors, the region from which the suspended CJN hails, comprising Governors from Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River (the home state of the CJN), Delta and Rivers States, with the exception of Edo State Governor, swiftly called for a meeting to drum support for their “son”, the CJN ([Ogundipe, 2019](#)). According to the Governors, Onoghen represents the people of the region in government and must not be removed or forced out of office, even though he confessed that he forgot to declare those accounts in contravention of the CCB Acts ([Ogundipe, 2019](#)). He does not matter to south-south Governors whether Onoghen was guilty, what was paramount to them was to defend the interest of their ethnic nationalities.

Another case of ethnicisation of corruption was the one involving former Governor of Taraba State, Jolly Nyame. A High Court of the Federal Capital Territory sitting at Gudu, on Wednesday, 30 May, 2018 convicted and sentenced Nyame to 14 years imprisonment without the option of fine. Specifically, the court sentenced Nyame to 14 years for criminal breach of trust, 2 years for misappropriation, 7 years for gratification and 5 years for obtaining valuable public properties without consideration ([Nnochiri, 2018](#)).

Unfortunately, protesters from the ethnic group of Nyame, numbering about 400 converged at the Mile Six Junction in Jalingo and marched through major streets of the town, causing vehicular traffic. The protesters were seen carrying placards with various inscriptions such as “Free Nyame”; “Temper justice with mercy”; and “We don’t want selective justice”, even as they marched to the residence of the former governor located along Jolly Nyame way in Jalingo ([Olowolagba, 2018](#)). Another evidence of ethnicisation of corruption manifested in the corruption trial of former Kano State Governor, Rabiu Kwankwaso. His supporters tramped out to solidarise with him in the court of law. Former Kwara State governor, Bukola Saraki, was supported by thousands of his kinsmen at the code of conduct tribunal, where he was accused of false asset declaration. Ditto for former Katsina State governor, Ibrahim Shema, who was supported and defended by members of his ethnic group ([Premium Times, 2018](#)). In Bayelsa State, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, a former governor of the state, got presidential pardon from his kinsman, Goodluck Jonathan, who was the President at that time. Alamieyeseigha was impeached, prosecuted and jailed in Nigeria for corruption and his assets, valued at about £17.7m, were confiscated ([Premium Times, 2018](#)). Former Governor of Delta State, James Ibori, was convicted in UK for 13 years over corruption and money laundering charges. He and his cohorts looted Delta State’s

resources. On return to Nigeria, after serving his jail term, his kinsmen gave him a rousing welcome and celebrated him ([Premium Times, 2018](#)).

In concrete terms, it is expedient to present a number of evidences of corruption in the system, majority of which exist and subsist in the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). This is understandable as Nigeria operates monolithic economy where oil alone contributes 70% to total government revenue ([NBS, 2015](#)). It is pathetic therefore to observe that the main source of government revenue has been hijacked and vandalised by the cabal. In the leaked letter written by the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Dr Ibe Kachikwu, to President Muhammadu Buhari, the former alleged circumvention of authorities and perversion of due process in the award of \$25bn (N9tn and N2.3tn higher than the national budget) contract, without recourse to the NNPC board ([Yakubu, 2017](#)). Nigeria Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, corroborated the massive pervasive corruption in the system when he alleged that \$15bn defence contract was missing and could not be accounted for and that two weeks before election, 100bn naira and \$295m were used for the re-election bid of the then sitting President under the cover of security ([Osinbajo, 2017a](#)). Similarly in 2014, there was allegation, which is still currently a subject of litigation, that \$2.2bn was illegally withdrawn from Excess Crude Oil Accounts, of which \$1bn was allegedly approved by former President Jonathan to fund his reelection campaign without the knowledge of the National Economic Council made up of state governors and the president and vice president ([Nwachukwu, 2015](#); [KPMG, 2010](#)). Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) discovered that \$11.6bn was missing from Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) Company dividend payments ([Nwachukwu, 2015](#); [Shamsuna, 2015](#)). Sixty million barrels of oil valued at \$13.7bn was allegedly stolen under the watch of the national oil company, NNPC, from 2009 to 2012 ([Shamsuna, 2015](#)). According to [Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative \(2015\)](#), losses accruing from crude swaps due to subsidy scam and domestic crude allocation from 2005 to 2012 stood at \$11.63bn, but this had been paid to the NNPC with no evidence of payment to the federation account.

It was also reported that 60% of \$1bn foreign loans obtained from the Chinese by the Ministry of Finance was stolen ([Abubakar and Salihu, 2016](#)). According to [Abubakar and Salihu \(2016\)](#), there was an allegation of massive scam in weapons and defense procurements, and misuse of 3tn Naira defence budget since 2011 under the guise of fighting Boko Haram. According to [Ezekwesili \(2012\)](#), corruption in the public spaces is mind-boggling. According to the [Economic and Financial Crimes Commission \(2017\)](#), corruption cases include 24bn Naira (\$66m) police pension allegedly diverted to private purse and over which some suspects are standing a trial in the court of law, including over 2bn Naira Niger Delta Development Commission contract award scams, which have been found not to conform to the Public Procurement Act ([EFCC, 2017](#)). According to [Ezekwesili \(2012\)](#), Nigeria has lost over \$400bn to corruption since independence. In a similar vein, the EFCC said \$217.7bn was illegally taken out of Nigeria between 1970 and 2008 ([EFCC, 2019](#)). The commission insisted that corruption was being perpetrated across levels and arms of government, including private sector ([EFCC, 2019](#)).

In addition, President Buhari alleged that a whopping \$16bn was expended on Independent Power Project (IPP) by the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo without a corresponding improvement in power supply in Nigeria ([Ali, 2018](#)). In fact, the fact-finding committee on power inaugurated by the House of Representatives indicted Obasanjo and other key players in the power sector. According to the report of the committee, \$16bn claimed to have been spent was a colossal waste of taxpayer money and a grand conspiratorial pilfering from national till as there was neither an improvement in power supply nor increment in national grid generating capacity ([Ali, 2018](#)). Then the next question is: "where is the power?"

It is no longer news that the issue of corruption in Nigeria has defiled all measures deployed to tackle it; what perhaps remains puzzling is the ethnic dimension to it. The theory adopted by the current study has revealed that the ubiquitous nature of corruption in Nigeria is a function of its ethnic underpinning. The ethnic and cultural fundament of Nigerian society is tied to and has been contaminated by corruption. According to the reports of NBS (2017), all public spaces have been enmeshed in corruption; from the family, to the schools, bureaucracy, civil society organisations, to religious institutions. According to Casimir *et al.* (2014), the institutions established for the purpose of, and statutorily saddled with, fighting corruption are themselves not immune from corruption. According to the NBS (2017), there is no single institution in Nigeria that is free of corruption. The law enforcement agencies are worse off as the recent corruption statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics identified the Police, Customs and Judiciary as the most bribe takers in the country (NBS, 2017). The future looks gloomy and tenebrous in the context where both private and public lives are stung by corruption.

Conclusion

The current study showed evidence of ethnicisation of corruption in Nigeria. Using two publics as a theoretical construct, the study concluded that it would be very difficult to nip corruption in the bud because of its ethnic dimension. Despite the establishment of anti-corruption institutions and adoption and deployment of various measures to combat it, corruption thrives unabated.

The critical challenge, which the persistence of corruption poses to all Nigerians of integrity and conscience, is, therefore, how to “de-ethnicise” corruption. Meeting this challenge will involve changing the orientation and psychological perception of Nigerians towards corruption. This can be done through enlightenment and national moral renaissance campaigns. The campaigns should transverse the length and breadth, nooks and crannies of the country. The messages of the campaigns, interpreted in all major Nigerian languages, should be terse, unambiguous and should touch the psyche and emotion of average Nigerian youth, highlighting the evils of corruption and the gains of sane society. Addendum to this is the need to introduce anti-corruption in the school curricula, from primary to tertiary levels of education. As the youth constitute the active population of any nation, there is the need to evolve genuine and impactful youth empowerment programmes that will create wealth for the youth and brighten their future. This will deter them from supporting corrupt individuals from their regions.

Also, punitive measures should be taken very seriously as punishment of infractions deter proliferation of such act. The existing laws against corruption need to be reviewed in tandem with the current trend and dynamic nature of corruption in the country. Long jail term should be adopted against corrupt officials. Judicial reform is imminent. In addition to the establishment of Anti-corruption Trial Monitoring Committee and the setting up of corruption trial courts, the National Judicial Commission (NJC) needs to reform the disciplinary process such that the petitions against judges will be treated with dispatch. There is urgent need to strengthen institutions saddling with fight against corruption. As it is, the anti-corruption institutions are built around the individual occupying the office of the president at one time or the other. Culture of integrity and probity in governance can be entrenched through strong institutions.

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