

# The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Bayelsa State: Exploring Political Corruption

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**Abstract:** *Political corruption has continued to pose a hindrance to democratic governance in Bayelsa State since the birth of democracy in 1999 in the state. This study, “interrogating the interface between Political corruption and Democratic Governance in Bayelsa State”, examines the relationship between political corruption and democratic governance. Political corruption impedes the benefits of democratic governance, however one must first acquire political power before becoming politically, Corrupt. From the beginning of the first republic to date, democratic governance in the state (Bayelsa State) has not really given much to the people. As the State with the least number of Local Government Areas in Nigeria’s Federal system, the level of development is not commensurate with the amount of financial resources received including the 13% oil revenue it had received from the federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) of the federal government. This is not unconnected to a corrupt political class in the state. The first executive governor of the state was convicted of corruption, and two past governors of the state were entangled in corruption charges. What are the effects of political corruption? It is observed in this study that, infrastructural and human capital under development in the state are major outcomes of political corruption. The only way to do away with this class of politicians is through the ballot, therefore there should be serious sensitization of the people, championed by Civil Society Groups (CSOs) on the evils of political corruption, and the need for them to reject any financial or material gifts as inducements from the political class especially on the day of election.*

**Keywords:** Bayelsa state, democracy, governance, political corruption

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## INTRODUCTION

Political corruption in Nigeria is exhibited at different levels of government by the political class. This has made the dividends of governance a mirage and characterized democratic governance with bad governance. Democratic governance is globally perceived as the best form of government because of its intrinsic characteristic and principles, but in practice the concept has been distorted

in many political environments, making it a mere theoretical expression with minimal benefits in these environments. Democracy largely depends on context and environments, even though certain irreducible characteristics remain, (Onuegbu, in Iwuagwu 2021).

The prevalence of political corruption in Nigeria and Bayelsa in particular, has deprived the people of good governance and sustainable development, subjecting them to unprecedented conditions of life. Most worrisome is that, security agencies and the institutions constitutionally saddled with the responsibility to fight corruption are also smeared. To some security agents and many electoral officers, election time in Nigeria is a period of boom. Democratic governance should be for the purpose of delivering essential political goods, that federal, State and local governments should exist to supply (Rotberg, 2015).

Bayelsa State, which was created in 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1996 is characterized by a political elite that have personalized the State, and not really demonstrated the essence of good governance. Bayelsa State is a one-city State, and has only 8 Local Government Areas, but it is abundantly rich in Natural resources. This abundance in natural resources has not reflected in the human capital and infrastructural development of the state, and this in itself is traceable to the politically corrupt elites who have mismanaged the huge resources accrued the state over time from the federation account. For Ake, (2008), development should elicit a more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth.

Since 1996, the State has been benefitting from 13% derivation from total oil production as well as the normal monthly statutory allocation of oil revenues which has amounted to billions of dollars, but this s yet to translate to commensurate tangible development and has not reflected in the living standard of the people of the state. The ostentatious life style of the political class and the general discontent of the people, with the political class in the way oil revenue has been managed, goes further to demonstrate the non-involvement of the people in governance and personalization of democratic governance. Democracy entails free and fair elections, independence of the judiciary, respect for human rights majority ruler, freedom of expression, rule of law etc, but in practice these basic features of democratic governance are manipulated by the political class to suite themselves. Most worrisome is the inability to conduct free and fair elections which could have been the instrument to change corrupt and bad leadership.

### **Governance**

The UNDP, World Bank, OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), Sees governance as the exercise of authority or power in other to manage a country's economic, political and administrative affairs ([www.ibe.unesco.org](http://www.ibe.unesco.org)). Governance is the process of mobilizing and organizing people and resources to achieve a common goal (Asobie, 2011)

### **Democratic Governance**

Democratic Governance entails the legal control or the process of overseeing the affairs of a state by the representatives of the people in conformity with the principles of democracy. According to Johari (2018), democratic governance implies a democratic system that acts according to the will of the people, constituted by the people and is accountable to the people.

### **Political Corruption**

Political corruption is mostly related to corruption championed by the Political class but may not be restricted to the political elite. Political corruption is any transaction between the private and public sector actors through which collective goods are illegitimately converted to personal purposes (Heidenheimer, et al 1993).

Political corruption occurs when the political class and state agents who are representatives of the people are themselves corrupt. It is when political decision makers use the political power given them by the people to sustain their interests, status and already acquired wealth (Amundsen, 1999). Political corruption is the diversion of scarce resources from poor and disadvantaged people to benefit themselves and their cronies (Transparency International, 2015).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employed the elite theory, though there are other theories that could have been used for this work. The leading proponents of the elite theory, which came into being in the early nineteenth and early twentieth century are vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941). The elite theorists argue that, in every society there are those who rise to the peak or top of their careers or occupation, and they are few and dominate the affairs of society economically and politically. According to Pareto (1848-1923), there is in every civilized community, an artistic, a sporting, scientific economic, political elite, and relatively a small group of persons who dominate the economic forces of the country, (Argarwal, 2007). Society according to them is divided into two, the few who have political power and allocate values, and the masses who are subject to the control of the few with political power. The elite theory holds the view that public policy is fundamentally influenced by the values, interests and preferences of a powerful political elite class (Nte, 2016). The theory is employed here to explain the personalization of the state and its machinery, by the political elite, and how this has distorted democratic governance in Bayelsa State, leading to deprivation of the people, of the benefits of democratic governance. This theory is also applied here to explain the misappropriation of the financial resources of the state, leading to the absence of infrastructural and human capital development.

### **An Overview of Political Corruption**

The concept of Political corruption is not new to the politics of Nigeria, but in contemporary times it has manifested in different dimensions. Literally the concept appears to be entangled with the political class and their activities, but empirically, it is a multifaceted phenomenon and smears even the civil population and the agencies saddled with the constitutional responsibility to curb it.

Though the political class are the only perceived culprits here, the civil populations have been co-opted to compliment the corrupt behaviours of the political class. As Idoko (2015) observed, that internal auditors and the auditing firms assigned to audit government officials are beneficiaries of such fraud.

There were cases of political corruption in the first and second republics, but political corruption in the fourth republic has taken an unprecedented dimension, with many unknown politically corrupt practices manifesting. Corruption in Nigeria has grown enormously in variety, magnitude and brazenness since the beginning of the second republic because it has been extravagantly fuelled by budgetary abuse and political patronage in an unprecedented scale (Achebe, 1998).

The concept of corruption is an encompassing term which has varying degree of negative impact on people of different environments. However, our focus here is political corruption in Bayelsa state, which is evidently more harmful to society than corruption in the private sector. Corruption is the breach or perversion of laid down rules, established procedures, code of conduct or social norms in the service of unethical or legitimate ends (Asobie, in Mohamed et al 2012). From the above definition, it entails that there is political corruption, when those entrusted with political power violates or perverts existing legal rules, procedures, code of conducts norms etc, or the use of such politically entrusted power to benefit self, associates, friends and relatives, to the detriment of society. Political corruption is indeed the major explanation for the seemingly insolvable problem of poverty, hunger and the general acute development tragedy in society. It has also seriously impeded the growth and effective utilization of resources (Egbue, 2007)

### **Political Corruption in Bayelsa State**

From 1999 to 2020, political corruption has manifested itself in various forms in Bayelsa State, ranging from exclusion in governance, diversion and embezzlement of public funds, Nepotism, manipulation of the electoral process through the instrumentality of State power extortion, misapplication of budget figures etc. The phenomenon continues to prevail because the causes are yet to be surmounted, and this is responsible for the absence of good governance and development. Endemic poverty, ostentatious lifestyle, fear of the unknown, primordial sentiments, weak institutions are some of the prevailing causes of political corruption in the State that have continued to defy all known measures.

It is pertinent to highlight some corruption cases in the State for the purpose of this study. As was reported in the vanguard account of October 20, 2004, the contract for the completion of the second phase of the Bayelsa State Secretariat was to cost N1.1 billion, the contract was awarded to G.CAPPA in 2000 by the first executive Governor of the State, D.S.P Alamiyeseigha with a part payment of N650 million. According to the report, the contract was revoked and re-awarded to CAT Construction Company with modification to a five storey because G. CAPPA was bankrupt. Several questions were asked for this singular action of government because there was no news of G.CAPPA being prosecuted. The finance commissioner (Opuala Charles) of Chief Timipre Silva,

the third executive governor of the State was invited severally by the EFCC for diversion of Public funds, but did not respond to the commission's invitation, but rather circumvented arrest which was a guilty disposition.

The commissioner of information in the administration of Hon. Seriake Dickson made it known on AIT (6/05/2012), that the Nembe-Brass road contract has been revoked but did not make clear if refund was made because it was reiterated that more than 50% of the total contract sum was already paid. This also went the way of the G. CAPP case as evident. Opinion leaders and scholars believe this in itself is a corrupt practice invented by the political class. As was reported by icpc.gov.ng (5/04/2022), the commission wrote to the federal high court sitting in Yenagoa, to prevent the Bayelsa State Government from stopping the investigation of some officials of the State government on corruption allegations. Why would a government want to stop the investigation of its officials who are smeared in corruption? The premium times reported on 10/8/2021, that the former governor of Bayelsa State Hon Seriake Dickson was in the custody of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), in Abuja for offences relating to abuse of office and misappropriation of public funds. Political corruption is openly demonstrated by the political class and their associates during periodic elections in the state, by engaging in the act of vote-buying and manipulation of electoral officials as well as influence the security agents to have their figures pronounced. Obviously, this is the major cause of mediocrity in governance.

### **Effects of Political Corruption**

Political corruption, no matter the nature of Political environment impacts some negative effects on the people and general wellbeing of the society. Though some of these negative effects may differ according to prevailing environmental factors across environments, there are also common effects that cuts across environments. Some of these negative effects of Political corruption includes, but not limited to, multidimensional inequality and poverty, infrastructural deficit in societies where political corruption prevail, flawed elections and subservient electoral body, corrupt civil service, impunity and injustice, weak institutions and economy, unrealistic sustainable Development Goals, civil disobedience, Public and Private Sector dysfunctionality, an easily manipulated judiciary, increased crime, distortion of democratic governance, human rights violations, youth restiveness and public frustration, etc.

In countries with widespread corruption, corruption will furthermore increase the operating cost of governance, revenues will leak out and the resources available for public services will wane. Governmental decision-making will be distorted, and government will fail to deliver the much needed public services. Another dilemma is that in non-democratic or semi-democratic systems, where political power is mainly used to pursue the interests of the ruling elite, an increase in the state's efficiency and viability might well in itself be detrimental to national development. It might imply a more efficient and personalized resource extraction for the benefit of the ruling Political elite, (Amudsen, 1999).

The impact of these effects are even more felt in poor and developing countries especially in Africa and South America than the developed world (North America, Europe and parts of Asia). The menace of Political corruption in Africa is in an unprecedented scale, and fast becoming a legitimate practice in some countries on the continent. While some states have recorded significant improvement on the corruption index, others are declining further. For instance, the case of corruption in Nigeria is not only systematic but pathetic, and has defied all known measures, with the impunity of the political class unrivalled anywhere. This is a major reason scholars have put forward, for the inability of democratic governance to produce the expected results.

### **Interface Between Governance and Corruption**

Governance and corruption are two different concepts with different meanings and interpretation. Governance entails the process of overseeing the affairs of a state or a section of a state, while corruption includes among others the abuse of public office for personal gains or inducing public office holders for private benefits, and this can also apply to the private sector.

According to Asobie, (in Mohammed et al 2012), corruption is the breach or perversion of legal rules, established procedure, code of conduct or social norms, in the service of unethical or illegitimate ends. For there to be a corrupt act, a rule or an establish procedure must be violated. The target of governance on the other hand is the welfare of the people and the general wellbeing of society, however there are two sides of governance (Good governance and bad governance). They are two sides of the same coin, and the meeting of corruption and governance distorts governance and makes it deviate from its original purpose of providing welfare for the people, and general wellbeing of society, producing negative outcomes such as; underdevelopment, unemployment, misappropriation of state resources, infrastructural decay, lack of quality education, weak economy etc, which can be referred to as bad governance. There is a strong connection between governance and corruption in Nigeria. There is a common perception in Nigeria that those in government have control over state resources, and this makes politics very tense in the country. Governance gives access to the limited opportunities created by the state, as well as an opportunity to serve and develop the state, but because of greed and fear of the unknown, those who find themselves in government violates laid down rules and procedures for personal gains (Fiemotongha, 2021).

The interface between corruption and governance inhibits the features of democratic governance in Nigeria. The political class who have access to governance have personalized governance depriving the people of the benefits of democratic governance. When corruption manifests in governance, the outcome is always negative. As demonstrated in the fourth republic the meeting of corruption and governance has deprived the people of the expected benefits of democratic governance. While good governance has the capacity to accelerate socio-economic, infrastructural and political development, corruption remains a major hurdle to the general wellbeing of society. This underscores the fact that political corruption and governance in Nigeria are intricately interwoven and this interwovenness is the precursor of bad governance (Mbaku, 2007). In Nigeria,

public roles and responsibilities are usually entrusted to public office holders in a quest for good governance, however most of the time, this trust is corrupted whereby public resources are diverted for personal use (Odeh, 2015). Globally, government, hold public funds and other resources in trust and it is expected that they do so with high standards of honesty, integrity, propriety and objectivity for the common good of the state (Waziri, 2009). However, it is not so in Nigeria, as several political office holders in the last administration headed by President Mohammadu Buhari are facing corruption charges in court, the case of the former Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) governor is instructive here.

### **Examining Democratic Governance in Bayelsa State**

Democracy, from its Greek origin has transcended from direct democracy to representative democracy today in almost every part of the world. This is with the conviction, that it is comparatively the best form of government. This acceptance and practice of democracy across the globe is driven by the intrinsic characteristics of the concept. However, it is pertinent to note that basic tenets of democracy has been distorted in many political environments and Nation-States,

and several factors could be responsible for this. The Social environment, economy, Natural endowment and political environment decides the extent to which the characteristics of democracy is observed (Alapiki,2004). It can be inferred from this variance in practice why definitions of the concept abound.

The concept of governance, is multifaceted, and deals with a whole lot of processes that borders on delivery of public goods. The term incorporates both good governance and bad governance, which is why the political class makes emphasis on good governance. According to Asobic (2011), governance is the process of organizing and mobilizing people and resources to achieve a common goal. Democratic governance can therefore be explained as the management and delivery of public goods to the people, championed by those saddled with the responsibility to manage the affairs of the State in line with the principles of democracy. Democratic governance in Bayelsa State, from inception in 1999, has contemporary democratic structures but has not really reflected the essence of democratic Governance.

The political system prevailing in Bayelsa State is merely a spoils system that benefits mostly the political elites and their associates. The State has been a victim of one successive fraudulent government to another, and there is the major problem of conducting free, fair and transparent elections. Elections are the gate-way to political and economic power, therefore politicians in the State employ various strategies to win elections, and it is working for them because the institutions (the electoral body and security agencies) saddled with the constitutional responsibility to check electoral fraud, and ensure that there is free fair and credible elections, are smeared and subservient to the ruling elite.

There can be no meaningful developments that positively impact on the people of the State if misgovernance continue to pervade. Any structural change that does, not impact on the living conditions of citizen positively in spite of rise in per capital income is questionable and lacking in human content of development (Allen,2006), democracy is expected to bring about development and development is encompassing and involves all facts of human life. The politics, the economy, culture and social life of society must improve before we can talk of development (Obikezi and obi,2004). Development is multi-dimensional, as it deals with the eradication of poverty, inequality, unemployment, infrastructural decay and the general wellbeing of the people. Political corruption in Bayelsa State has not really reflected good governance and development, which are salient ingredients of democratic governance, hence the negative factors mentioned in this study continued to prevail in the State.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed the qualitative and quantitative methods in the collection of data. This entails that data was collected from text books, journals, academic projects works, magazines, internet materials etc, as well as through the administration of questionnaires. Data analysis was done using quantitative method.

### RQ1 Effects of Political Corruption

S/N	ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1.	Distorts democratic governance	260	65%
2.	Infrastructural deficit	235	58.75%
3.	Lack of human capital development	255	63.75%
4.	Negative influence on the electoral system	210	52.5%
5.	Exclusion in governance	225	56.25%

#### *Researchers field work*

The table above shows the responses of respondents to political corruption in Bayelsa state. It reflects the opinion of respondents in communities in the eight local government areas of Bayelsa State.

As indicated on the table in response to item 1, 260 respondents, which is 65% of the sample population affirms that one of the effects of political corruption is that, it distorts democratic governance. In response to item 2, on the table, 235 respondents about 58.75% are of the opinion that infrastructural deficit in Bayelsa State is a result of political corruption. This means political corruption is the cause of infrastructural deficit in the state, according to the funding of this study, because it is the view of majority of the respondents. 255 respondents in response to item 3, on the table are of the view that lack of human capital development is also an effect of political corruption. This figure is about 63.75% of the population and more than half of total response. Item 4, on the table received the least responses. 210 respondents which is 52.5% are of the view that negative influence on the electoral system is an effect of political corruption. It is the view of most



respondents that there is political exclusion in the state, caused by political corruption. 225 respondents amounting to 56.25% are of the view that political opponents and all those who do not identify with the government in power is excluded the government.

### **RQ2 The Interface between Political Corruption and Democratic Governance**

S/N	ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1.	Vote buying	292	73%
2.	Absence of political inequality	270	67.5%
3.	Denies the people of the dividends of democratic governance	315	78.75%
4.	Weakens State institutions	282	70.5%
5.	Prevents free, fair and credible election	205	51.25%

#### *Researchers field work*

The table above shows the responses of respondents to items under research question 2, which are also presented in frequency and percentage. It shows respondents making up the sample population selected from the eight local governments areas of Bayelsa State.

As demonstrated above, the interface between political corruption and democratic governance leads to outcome that are detrimental to the people. In response to vote buying, which is the first item on the table, 292 respondents making 73% of the population are of the view that interface between political corruption and democratic governance leads to vote buying during elections. This indicates that the political class and their associates uses their corruptly acquired wealth to negatively influence voters at elections. Political equality is a feature of democratic governance, however this feature is derived the people when political corruption interfaces with democratic governance. 270 respondents are of the opinion that the interface between political corruption and democracy denies the people the dividends of democracy, which amounts to about 78.75%, producing the highest response from respondents on the table. While 282 respondents out of the 400 sample size, are of the view that the interface leads to weak state institutions. This is 70.5% of the population. The response of respondents on the 5<sup>th</sup> item on the table shows that the interface also prevents free fair and credible elections in the state. 205 respondents which is about 51.25% supported this view.

### **CONCLUSION**

The interface between political corruption and democratic governance in Bayelsa State has produced negative factors that have continue to bedevil governance in the State. As demonstrated in the responses of respondents to the items on the tables, there are negative effects of political corruption in the state, such as; infrastructural deficit, lack of human capital development, negative influence on the electoral system by the political class etc, the prevalence of political corruption has also led to; vote buying by the political class, absence of political equality, weak state

institutions etc, and all these negative factors have continue hinders democratic governance in the state.

### Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Legislations should be put in place to introduce capital punishment for corrupt public office holders to deter the political class.
- ii. Civil Society Organisations should take it upon themselves to sensitize and educate the people on the dangers of political corruption. This way the people can resist the corrupt political class as well as hold them accountable for mismanaging our common wealth.
- iii. Democracy cannot thrive without strong institutions, therefore state institutions should be strengthened to be independent of the executive and legislative, like in the developed democracies.

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