Public Perceptions of Government's Effectiveness in Handling Corruption in Nigeria

IP Iroghama

University of Benin, Institute of Public Administration and Extension Services, Benin City, Nigeria.

Correspondence: Iroghama Paul Iroghama, iroghama@uniben.edu, iroghama1@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study seeks to explain perceptions of government handling of corruption issues in Nigeria. Discussions about corruption management often include the genuineness of government intention in combating the menacing effects of corrupt acts of government officials, especially those of politicians. In particular, questions are often raised on how well current government is handling corruption issues. Against this background, a survey was conducted by Afrobarometer Organization in 1999 to assess public opinion on perceptions of government handling (fighting) of corruption. Descriptive statistics provided background information on the sample, while probit logistics regression using STATA "oprobit" routine were used to measure perception of government handling of (how well current government is handling) corruption in Nigeria. The findings suggested that in Nigeria, those that are highly satisfied with their economic condition say that the government is handling fight against corruption well. In addition, the findings also indicated that gender, residency, trust in president, social trust, interest in politics, and contact with government officials affects perceptions of how well government is handling fight against corruption. The study also finds that statistically significant variables have the probability to strongly influence perceptions of government handling of corruption. Although this study does not claim to provide all the answers on management of corruption, it is an attempt to bridge gap in the literature on the topic and forms a basis upon which further analytical work on perception among Nigerians of current government's handling of corruption can be carried out.

Keywords: Economic condition; corruption; perception of corruption; political trust; social trust; Nigeria; sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Introduction

Discussions regarding corruption management often include the genuineness of government intension in combating the menacing effects of corrupt acts of government officials, especially those of politicians. In particular, questions are often raised on how well current government is handling corruption issues. Effective handling of corruption especially those of political appointee is vital to the elimination of the negative perception of political corruption in emerging democracy, such as that of Nigeria. In recent years, billions of Naira has been spent to organize seminars, debates, and conferences to proffer solutions as to ways of managing the menacing effects of corrupt acts of public officials. In spite of these efforts by government, corruption management is still dismal.

2. Corruption Management

It is a truism that corruption is tragic and its pervasiveness led to dismal economic performance of countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa. It has been documented by analysts [1-4] that corruption in Nigeria has been a bane of development. In appreciation of this fact, corruption-fighting institutions such as Independent and Corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) were setup. In spite of these commissions, successive governments have not done much in terms of fighting corruption that actually exists, especially in government.

In 1999, after successive military regimes, a presidential election was conducted that ushered in a retired military elite, general Obasanjo, who as former head of state led the country to enormous growth and had returned her to democratic rule in the second republic. Also, the new President Obasanjo had helped established Transparency International (TI). His second emergence in public life was seen by others as an effective crusader in the fight against corruption.

Against this background, a survey was undertaken in late 1999 by the Afrobarometer Group, an organization that assesses data on attitudes toward democracy, markets, and civil society in several sub-Saharan African nations, to investigate among other issues, public perceptions of how well the current government is fighting corruption. The 1999 Afrobarometer respondents were asked to

rate, in addition to how well current government is managing corruption, how satisfied they feel currently with their economic condition and to give their overall assessment of the performance of their government's fight against corruption. In addition, opinion were also elicited on how often they have broken the law by engaging in such acts as offering bribes to civil servants, and how well their current government is handling problems such as creating jobs and fighting government corruption. Corruption management was measured by asking respondents to choose among "very badly", "fairly badly", "fairly well", and "very well" answers.

Nigerians perceptions of fight against corruption are vital to the war on corruption. Successes or failures of anti-corruption campaign feed on people's perception of the validity of government intensions of effective management of corruption issues. Dismal management of corruption can pose serous problems for political and economic development, such as, erosion of public confidence (local or international), a loss of legitimacy of government [5], and reduction in foreign direct investment [6].

With the issue of corruption gaining currency within Nigeria, this paper focuses on perception of how well the government is fighting corruption within Nigeria. In particular, this paper looks at how citizens perceived the fight against corruption and in the process seeks to model how Nigerian's perceptions of corruption management are measured. The influence of observational data, such as economic condition, media exposure, residency, among other variables, on how well the government is managing corruption will be examined. To my mind, answering this question would help to understand whether perceptions of fight against corruption is due to characteristics of individual or not. To this end, the 1999 Afrobarometer Survey "Round One" is used to examine relationship between individual-level characteristics and how well the government is handling corruption.

In the literature on political corruption, competing theories of corruption are prominent. Some adduce cultural traditions, such as respect for elders [3, 7, 9], as the main factor that explained endemic nature of corruption especially in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Werlin (1972), analyzing the root causes of corruption in Ghana, strongly argued that rising corruption in Ghana is not only a result of fundamental political disorder, but of "the persistence of traditional values which conflict with the requirements for a secular way of life" [8, p. 254].

Some studies [2, 10, 11] note that political fragmentation and flawed personality are the main factors that explained endemic nature of corruption. For example, Brownsberger (1983), disputing cultural traditions, noted that Africans know the difference between polite graft and bribery and that the relationship between traditional gift giving, patronage, and attitudes of reverence, are not present in much of modern day corruption. He consequently concluded that much of contemporary corruption seemed from Africans desiring to be as wealthy as Europeans are—"the dazzling status of the white man"—underdevelopment of interest group politics, and fragmentation of political life in Nigeria. He further notes: "[M]any in civil services have been corrupted inwardly-weaken by dazzling inequality, divided loyalties, and disorienting urban life, and the fragmentation of political life in Nigeria continues to channel loyalty away from the policy process and the abstract state back to self and tribe" [2, p. 231]. Mauro (1995) further adds, "the presence of many different ethnolinguistic groups is also significantly associated with worse corruption" [11, p. 693].

Others have used market characteristics [10, 12] to explain pervasive corruption. These studies have found out for instance, that attempt by government to arrest market failures, through intervention, create incentive for corruption [12]. Still others have used residency and effective bureaucracy [13] as the main factors to explain corruption. For example, these authors argued that urban area, informed electorates, and the size of the bureaucracy as a measure of historical/cultural variables affects the relative level of political corruption.

Emphases on traditional values, ethnolinguistic groups, market characteristics, residency, and other factors as predictors of corruption have often been examined through case studies. Additionally, most analyses have been carried out without highly aggregated data. A micro-level analysis using public opinion survey data (question by question) is important if empirical linkages are to be established. Knowing what citizens think about government handling of corrupt practices will be helpful for understanding if the fight against corruption is perceived favorably. Therefore, this study will use the 1999 Afrobarometer survey data to investigate empirical linkages.

3. Methods

The study analyzes the Afrobarometer "Round One" survey, which was conducted in 1999 by a consortium of African researchers, in collaboration with Michigan State University in the U.S.A. The Afrobarometer survey series represents a large-scale, cross-national survey research project designed to systematically map mass attitudes to democracy, markets, and civil society in more than a dozen sub-Saharan African nations over time. More specifically, the series furnishes research data on democracy, governance, livelihoods, macroeconomics and markets, political regimes and political transitions in sub-Sahara Africa. Afrobarometer surveys are conducted periodically in more than a dozen sub-Saharan nations including Nigeria. Afrobarometer survey techniques and survey questions slightly vary from country to country, in order to capture specificity in each country. For detailed explanation of the survey methodology and sampling strategy, please see Afrobarometer survey group web site (Afrobarometer.org)

The survey conducted in Nigeria asked respondents what they think about a variety of national issues. Although the survey does not contain a battery of questions assessing perception of specific types of political corruption, it does include items which provide a useful overall summary of perception of corruption management. The question is "how well would you say the current government is handling (fighting) corruption in government?" Figure 1 illustrates perceptions of how current government is handling the issue of corruption. As shown, 67.3 percent say that the government is handling corruption "well", while about 32 percent answered "badly."
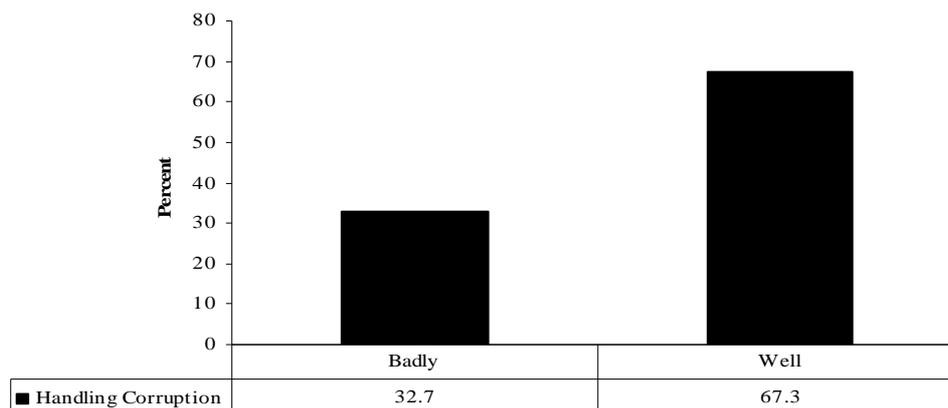

	Badly	Well
■ Handling Corruption	32.7	67.3

Figure 1: Perceptions of how government is handling corruption in Nigeria, Afrobarometer Survey (1999).

Based on research, the dependent variable is the handling corruption variable. Since the variable has four ordinal categories, parameters are estimated using ordered probit. The dependent variable is scored: "very badly" = 1, "fairly badly" = 2, "fairly well" = 3, "very well" = 4. Model parameters are estimated using STATA 8SE'S "oprobit" routine. The model comprises all the independent variables as predictors. Thus, the model is specified as:

$$\text{HANDLCORRUPT} = f\,[\beta_0 + \beta_2\text{PERSAT} + \beta_3\text{AGE} + \beta_4\text{GENDER} + \beta_5\text{REGION (NORTH, WEST, EAST)} + \beta_6\text{URB} + \beta_7\text{MEDIA} + \beta_8\text{EDUC} + \beta_9\text{INTRPOL} + \beta_{10}\text{CONTGOV} + \beta_{11}\text{TRUSTGEN} + \beta_{12}\text{TRUSTPRE}]$$

where, HANDLCORRUPT = badly/well of how government is handling corruption; PERSAT = personal satisfaction of economic condition; AGE = age in years; GENDER = gender; REGION = north, west, and east; URB = urban or rural area; MEDIA = media

consumption; EDUC = education; INTRPOL = interested in politics; TRUSTGEN = social trust; TRUSTPRE = trust the president; CONTGOV = contact government officials; ß's = parameters to be estimated.

4. Results

Nigeria is made of three main ethnic groups, which are Hausa/Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east. As Figure 2 shows, 31.5 percent of the survey respondents are from the Hausa/Fulani, 25.5 percent from the Yoruba, 16.7 are Igbo, while the rest comprise other ethnic groups.
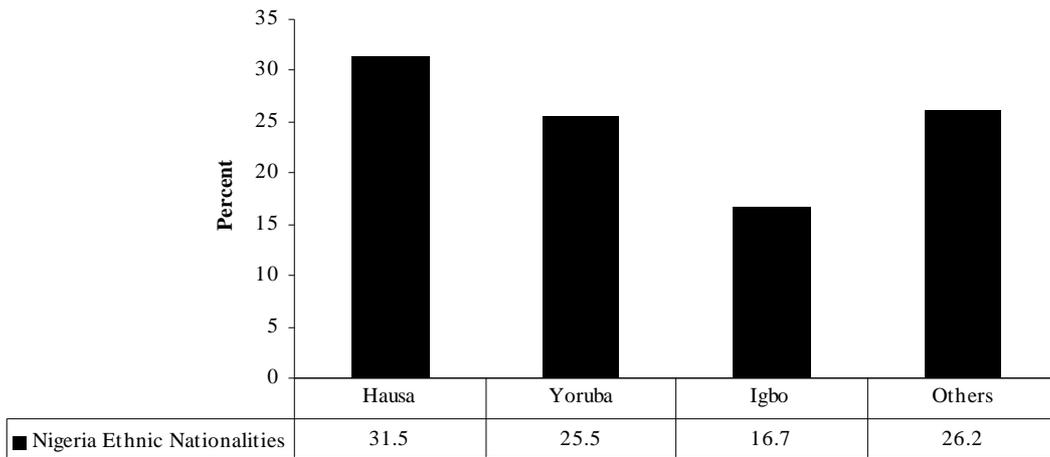
	Hausa	Yoruba	Igbo	Others
■ Nigeria Ethnic Nationalities	31.5	25.5	16.7	26.2

Figure 2: Ethnicity of respondents in Nigeria, Afrobarometer Survey (1999).

Also, as Figure 3 shows, 25.3 percent of the respondents have no formal education, 17 percent have elementary education, almost half (43.9%) have some form of secondary education, and 13.8 percent have some university education. A total of 3,424 respondents were surveyed by the Afrobarometer group.
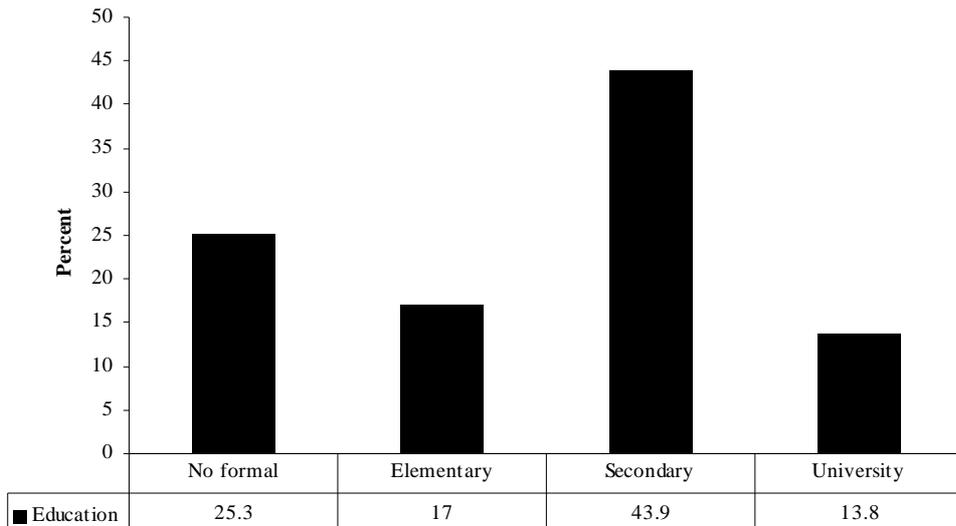
	No formal	Elementary	Secondary	University
■ Education	25.3	17	43.9	13.8

Figure 3: Educational level of respondents in Nigeria, Afrobarometer Survey (1999).

Table 1 shows the various individual level characteristics that are statistically significant influences of perceptions of how well the current government is handling corruption in Nigeria. The probit regression revealed that those who are highly satisfied of their economic condition believed that the government is handling (fighting) corruption well. Specifically, those who believe that they are fulfilling their life's dream are significantly more likely to believe that the government is handling corruption well. Regarding gender, women more than men is significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to say that the government is handling corruption very well. In other words, women on average are more likely than men to approve the government's efforts in combating corruption.

Using the northern region as the reference category, perceptions of how well the government is handling (fighting) corruption is significantly more favorable in the eastern region. Respondents other than those from the northern and western region are significantly more likely ($p < 0.10$) to approve of the government's efforts in combating corruption. This finding is consistent with [2, 11] theory of fragmentation of political life that "the presence of many different ethnolinguistic groups is also significantly associated with worse corruption" [11, p. 693].

Regarding other predictor variables, those who have social trust are significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to believe that the government is fighting corruption well. Furthermore, those that trust the president are significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to accept government handling of corruption issues. In contrast, those who have contact with government officials and those who are interested in politics are significantly less likely ($p < 0.01$) to believe that the government is handling corruption well.

Regarding the magnitude of the effect of "trust the president" variable, it is note worthy that President Obasanjo, a former military leader, was newly sworn in as new President of Nigeria when the survey was conducted. As former head of state and an anti-corruption crusader, he led the country to enormous growth and returned her to democratic rule in the second republic. Also, President Obasanjo had helped establish Transparency International (TI). "Describing Obasanjo as a great leader, Eigen, Chairman of TI, went down memory lane narrating how he established TI with Obasanjo, stressing that only few believed in the body then" [14, p. 8]. His second bid in public life as civilian president could be seen by others as sign of an effective administrator.

5.   Probabilities

While coefficients in OLS regression analyses have straightforward interpretations, probit coefficients are relatively opaque. To illustrate the relative impact of the predictor variables in the analyses, changes in probability of perceiving how well the government is handling corruption were calculated when each significant predictor was varied from its minimum to its maximum value, while other predictors were held at their mean values. These probabilities were calculated using CLARIFY software for STATA.

See Figure 4 for results of the probabilities. When predictors of how well current government is handling corruption are set at their mean, the significant predictors all have effects. Apart from gender, the rest of the significant predictors decrease the probability of approving how well current government is handling corruption. These effect ranges from two points for personal satisfaction to 11 percentage points for interest in politics. Upon examination, these probabilities show that the each predictor variables have the potential to positively or negatively influence perception of corruption.

6.   Conclusion

In this study, survey measure of the role of several observational characteristics was used to analyze the perceptions of how well current government is handling (fighting) corruption in Nigeria. The study's principal objective has been to explain what factors account for perceived government handling of corruption issues. Specifically, what are the individual level characteristics that influence perception of how well current government is handling corruption?

To sum up, the study concludes that in Nigeria, economic condition, sex of the respondents, residency, social trust, political trust (trust in the president), interest in politics, and contact with government officials significantly affected evaluations of the government's work in fighting corruption. One interesting finding is that trusting of president positively affects the government's approval rating in fight against corruption. This finding could be indicative that General Obasanjo, as civilian president, is trusted by Nigerians as he had helped establish Transparency International (TI). The study also finds evidence that statistically significant individual level characteristics have the probability to positively or negatively influence perceptions of current government's handling of corruption in Nigeria.

Table 1: Ordered Probit Analyses of Perception of the Extent to which the Current Government is Fighting Corruption Effectively in Nigeria, 1999 Afrobarometer Surveys.

Predictor Variables	ß's
Education	-0.031
	(-0.024)
Age	-0.036
	(-0.026)
Gender	-0.011
	-0.039)***
Region:	
West	-0.011
	(0.045)
East	-0.021
	(-0.057)*
Urban or Rural	-0.086
	(-0.046)
Media Consumption	-0.035
	(0.025)
Personal Satisfaction	0.063
	(0.017)***
Social Trust	0.101
	(0.030)***
Trust President	-0.074
	(0.017)***
Interested in Politics	-0.105
	(-0.016)***
Contact Government Officials	-0.05
	(-0.031)*
McKelvey R^2	0.069
Observations	3, 348

*** $p < 0.01$;   ** $p < 0.05$;   * $p < 0.10$;   (one-tailed test)
Standard errors in parentheses

Figure 4: Effects of significant predictors on probability of approving current government handling of corruption in Nigeria.
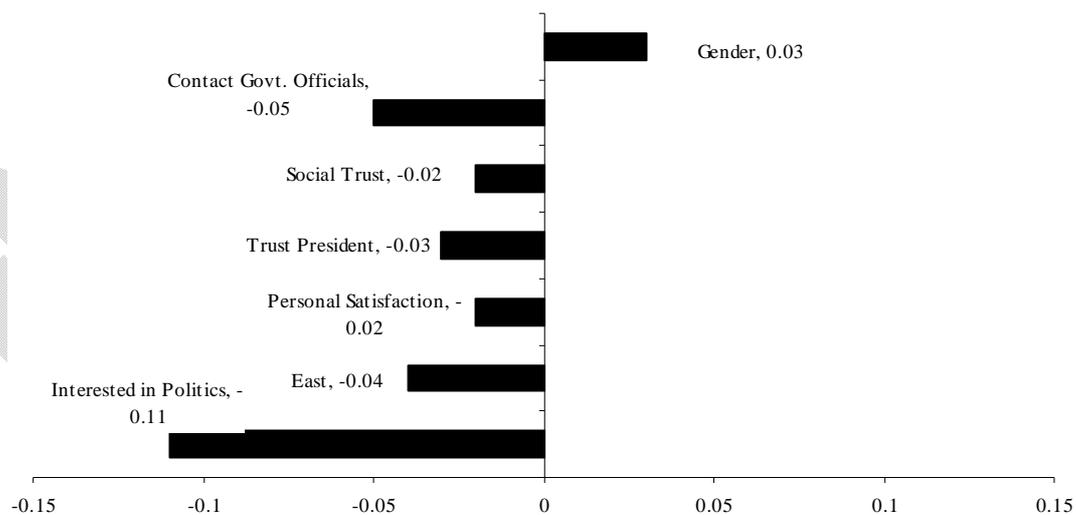
The finding that those that are highly satisfied with their economic condition are significantly more likely to approve of government effort in combating corruption suggests the need for some policy option. There is a need for all, not just those who are highly satisfied, to actively engage in policy debate on the need by government to effectively combat negative effects of corruption as dismal handling of corruption can lead to substandard economic growth.

One general limitation of this study is the low R^2 of the analyses. Perhaps this could result from the fact that Afrobarometer survey data are capturing lots of noise produce by interviewing many poor, uneducated people, or is indicative of survey data generally, or it could attest to the related lack of sophistication of the data gathering procedure. However, despite these data limitations, the study has been able to derive meaningful results that appear robust. While caution is needed in drawing conclusion, it is clear that satisfaction with economic condition, sex of the respondent, residency, social trust, political trust, interest in politics, and contact with government officials significantly influence perception of how well current government is handling corruption in Nigeria. It was not expected that this study would provide all the answers on perceptions of government handling of corruption issues. It is anticipated that future research is needed that will use either cohort or longitudinal study to examine individual characteristics that affect perceptions of how well current government is fighting corruption.

Thus, notwithstanding its data limitation, the study was able to uncover interesting and important relationships. Given the paucity of high quality data in sub-Saharan Africa countries, it is little wonder that not much has been done at the micro level. The study results justify the importance of the topic as well as emphasizing the need for better data.

Competing Interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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