

Effect of Corrupt Practices on the Stability of Political Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa



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Abstract

Aim: This study explored the relationship between corrupt practices and political stability within the Sub-Saharan African countries

Methods: This study was a desk review of various textual sources, including peer-reviewed articles, media reports, official documents, and public discourse, to uncover patterns, themes, and nuances related to corruption and its consequences on political stability.

Results: The study found that a consistent pattern across diverse political contexts, indicating that high levels of corruption are a key driver of the erosion of trust in political institutions. Instances of embezzlement and bribery, when prevalent within political structures, create a climate of discontent and dissatisfaction among the citizens. The findings depict a significant connection between corrupt practices and poor economic progress within the Sub-Saharan region. The study also found a strong relationship between corrupt practices and the erosion of essential elements of democracy, such as electoral integrity and fair representation. Instances of electoral fraud, vote-buying, and manipulation emerge as key factors that compromise the democratic ideals of fair representation and citizen participation in the political process.

Conclusion: Corruption is associated with the erosion of trust in political institutions, hindered economic progress, and compromised democratic principles across various political contexts.

Recommendations: The study recommends policymakers and development agencies promote anti-corruption measures and policies that ensure the transparent and accountable use of resources in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study also recommends advocates of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa champion the importance of robust anti-corruption measures and the safeguarding of electoral processes to ensure the continued legitimacy of democratic governance. The study further recommends that political leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa address corruption as a strategic move to enhance the region's credibility and attractiveness to foreign investors and partners.

Keywords: *Corruption, Sub-Saharan Africa, political stability, political systems*

INTRODUCTION

Corrupt practices and their intersection with the stability of political institutions constitute a complex relationship that has far-reaching implications for governance and societal well-being (Ceva & Ferretti, 2021). Scholars have long acknowledged the intricate dynamics between corruption and political stability, recognizing that corruption can act as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force within political systems (Rothstein & Varraich, 2017). This exploration delves into the multifaceted nature of this relationship, aiming to shed light on the various mechanisms through which corruption influences the stability of political institutions.

According to Ceva et al. (2021), one facet of the relationship between corruption and political stability lies in the destabilizing impact of corrupt practices on institutional integrity. Empirical studies highlight that pervasive corruption weakens the foundations of political institutions by eroding public trust, fostering a culture of impunity, and compromising the rule of law (Saini, 2022). Corrupt practices undermine the legitimacy of political structures, leading to a loss of faith among citizens and contributing to social unrest (Valadez, 2018). Instances of corruption scandals and the misuse of public resources often trigger political instability as public dissatisfaction intensifies.

Contrary to its destabilizing effects, corruption can, paradoxically, serve as a stabilizing mechanism in certain political contexts. Some argue that corrupt practices, when strategically employed, can facilitate the smooth functioning of political institutions by fostering political cohesion and ensuring the survival of ruling elites (Della Porta & Vannucci, 2016). In such cases, corruption may be perceived as a pragmatic tool for maintaining order and political continuity, even if it compromises principles of transparency and accountability. This perspective underscores the complexity of the relationship, where corrupt practices may be embedded as informal mechanisms for political stability.

The nature of the relationship between corruption and political stability becomes evident when considering the different dimensions of stability. While corruption may contribute to short-term stability by appeasing certain interest groups or maintaining a semblance of order, it often undermines the long-term institutional resilience required for sustained political stability (Tyce, 2019). The nuances lie in discerning between apparent stability and the robustness of institutions that withstand external pressures and internal challenges over time.

One notable historical example of corruption eroding political stability is observed in the case of Nigeria during the era of military rule (Fagbadebo, 2019; Roy, 2017). The prolonged military regimes, characterized by widespread corruption and embezzlement of public funds, undermined the legitimacy of governance structures. Rampant corruption not only facilitated authoritarian rule but also fueled discontent among citizens, leading to political instability marked by protests and uprisings (Folarin, 2021). The misappropriation of resources, exemplified by the Abacha regime, significantly contributed to economic mismanagement and societal unrest, ultimately destabilizing the political landscape.

Contrastingly, historical instances in which corruption contributed to political stability can be discerned in certain African nations. During the early post-independence period, some leaders strategically employed patronage systems and clientelism to consolidate power and maintain stability. In Kenya, for instance, President Jomo Kenyatta's regime utilized a network of patronage to foster loyalty and cohesion among political elites (Angelo, 2020). While characterized by corruption, this approach served as a stabilizing force, providing a semblance of political order in a diverse and potentially fractious society.

The case of the Democratic Republic of Congo under Mobutu Sese Seko exemplifies a historical narrative where corruption played dual roles. Mobutu's regime, marked by extensive corruption and embezzlement, initially bolstered stability through a centralization of power. However, the pervasive corruption became a double-edged sword, contributing to the eventual erosion of political stability. Economic decline, fueled by embezzlement and mismanagement, coupled with social unrest, led to Mobutu's overthrow in 1997 (Wang'ombe, 2018). This historical episode illustrates the intricate dynamics whereby corruption can initially stabilize political structures but eventually become a catalyst for instability.

In the post-apartheid era, South Africa provides a contemporary case study where corruption has posed challenges to political stability. The ANC-led government faced allegations of corruption, particularly during the presidency of Jacob Zuma. Corruption scandals, including the mismanagement of state resources, led to strained public trust and heightened political tensions (Mlambo, 2019). While South Africa has navigated periods of political stability, corruption has emerged as a destabilizing force, demanding institutional responses to maintain governance legitimacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate relationship between political institutions, corruption, and political stability (Peters, 2019). This theory recognizes the dual dimensions of political institutions—formal and informal. According to Sjöstedt (2015), formal institutions encompass the legal frameworks, organizational structures, and written rules that govern political behavior. Informal institutions, on the other hand, involve unwritten norms, traditions, and social practices that influence political conduct. Together, these dimensions create a complex institutional landscape that either hinders or facilitates corruption.

Political institutions include a spectrum of entities, both governmental and non-governmental, each playing a crucial role in shaping the prevalence and impact of corruption (Dupuy, Ron, & Prakash, 2016). Governmental institutions, such as legislative bodies, executive branches, and judiciary, establish the formal rules and regulations. Non-governmental institutions, including civil society organizations and the media, contribute to the informal checks and balances that influence the behavior of political actors (Dupuy et al., 2016). The impact of political institutions on corruption is profound, determining whether corruption is curbed or perpetuated within a given political system. Well-designed governmental institutions with strong regulatory frameworks and effective enforcement mechanisms serve as barriers to corruption. In contrast, weak or dysfunctional institutions create fertile ground for corrupt practices to flourish (Falkenhain, 2020).

Institutional design plays a critical role in shaping the behavior of political actors. The design of institutions influences the incentives and constraints faced by individuals within the political system. As stated by Porter, Allen, and Angle (2016), robust institutional design, characterized by transparency, accountability mechanisms, and separation of powers, fosters an environment less conducive to corruption. The effectiveness of regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms within political institutions is pivotal in determining their impact on corruption. Stringent regulations, backed by credible enforcement, act as deterrents to corrupt behavior.

Conversely, lax enforcement or loopholes in regulatory frameworks provide opportunities for corruption to take root (Falkenhain, 2020).

Rent-Seeking Theory

Rent-seeking theory provides a powerful analytical framework for comprehending the intricate relationship between corruption and the extraction of economic rents (Mihályi & Szelényi, 2019). This lens offers valuable insights into how individuals or groups within a political context may exploit corrupt practices as a mechanism to seek and extract economic rents, often to the detriment of broader societal interests.

Economic rents, in the context of rent-seeking theory, refer to returns exceeding the cost of investment or production, gained through non-competitive means (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2016). These excess returns can be extracted through various channels, such as preferential policies, regulatory capture, or other forms of market manipulation. Corruption becomes a potent tool for rent-seeking when individuals or groups engage in activities aimed at capturing economic rents through illicit means (Takano, 2017). This may involve bribery, nepotism, or the manipulation of decision-making processes to secure favorable conditions that enable the extraction of excess economic gains. In political contexts, rent-seeking behavior often manifests through the manipulation of policies, regulations, or decision-making processes for personal gain. This can include securing lucrative government contracts, influencing legislative decisions, or gaining preferential access to valuable resources through corrupt practices ((Ahmed et al., 2016).

The central concern of rent-seeking theory lies in the adverse impact of such practices on broader societal interests. As stated by Auriol, Straub, and Flochel (2016), resources that could contribute to public goods, social services, or equitable economic development are diverted for narrow, self-serving purposes when economic rents are extracted through corruption. This diversion contributes to economic inefficiency, and inequality, and undermines the overall welfare of society. Analyzing how corruption functions as a tool for rent extraction provides a framework for understanding its potentially destabilizing effects on political systems. As rent-seeking practices become pervasive, they can erode public trust in institutions, fuel social discontent, and lead to political instability. The concentration of economic benefits among a privileged few at the expense of the broader population can create fertile ground for social unrest and political upheaval (Thillainathan & Cheong, 2019).

Empirical Review

A study conducted in Kenya by D'Arcy and Cornell (2016) investigated the impact of corruption on political stability in Kenya from 2015 to 2019. The findings revealed a positive correlation between high-level corruption and heightened political instability. Clear evidence also emerged of corruption influencing electoral processes, potentially compromising their integrity. Public dissatisfaction with perceived corrupt practices translated into protests and civil unrest, shaping the political landscape. This collective expression of discontent underscores the significant societal repercussions of corruption, as citizens actively seek to address and rectify perceived injustices, demanding transparency, accountability, and genuine democratic reforms in response to corrupt practices within the political sphere.

In Nigeria, a study by Otusanya and Lauwo (2019) aimed to assess the relationship between corruption and political stability from 2013 to 2017. The researchers employed a longitudinal analysis, utilizing official corruption reports and econometric modeling, and supplemented their findings with qualitative interviews with experts. The study indicated systemic corruption

significantly undermined the effectiveness of the Nigerian government. Clear evidence also emerged of corruption contributing to ethno-political conflicts, exacerbating existing societal tensions. Economic disparities were identified as a consequence of corrupt practices, further influencing political stability.

Similarly, a study conducted in South Africa by Mantzaris and Pillay (2017) explored the role of corruption in service delivery. Using a case study analysis, the researchers incorporated official corruption reports, media analysis, and expert interviews to collect data. The findings revealed that corruption is linked to challenges in service delivery, contributing to public trust erosion. There was also clear evidence of corrupt practices contributing to political party fragmentation, and influencing the political landscape. The impact of corruption on regulatory frameworks affected political stability, with implications for governance. As corrupt practices infiltrate the mechanisms of service provision, citizens experience inefficiency in the delivery of essential services. This erosion of trust is rooted in the realization that corruption not only diverts resources away from their intended purposes but also perpetuates a sense of injustice and inequality among the public.

In Mozambique, Wache (2015) studied the effect of corruption on the stability of the political landscape from 2012 to 2016. The findings highlighted that corruption contributed to economic inequality and social unrest within the country. Evidence also pointed to corruption influencing policy decisions and resource allocation, shaping the political landscape. Public perception of corruption eroded trust in political institutions, impacting overall political stability. The study also showed that the prevalence of bribery and extortion within administrative processes impeded small businesses and entrepreneurs, limiting opportunities for economic empowerment. Furthermore, corruption eroded the rule of law, discouraging domestic and foreign investments that could foster economic development and job creation. As a result, the cumulative impact of corruption on public resources, economic policies, and investment climate collectively contributed to the perpetuation of poverty, creating a cycle that is challenging to break without concerted efforts to address systemic corruption.

The study by Maunganidze (2016) in Zimbabwe found that corrupt practices were linked to economic decline and hyperinflation within Zimbabwe. Clear evidence also emerged of corruption contributing to electoral irregularities, shaping the political landscape. Public dissatisfaction with perceived corruption led to social movements, indicating a public response to political instability. Mtuwa and Chiweza (2023) in Malawi found that corruption contributed to institutional weaknesses and governance challenges. Evidence also emerged of corruption influencing public service delivery, impacting citizen perceptions of political stability.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Corruption Erodes Public Trust

The research reveals a consistent pattern across diverse political contexts, indicating that high levels of corruption are a key driver of the erosion of trust in political institutions. Citizens' perceptions of corruption act as a formidable barrier to effective governance, resulting in a tangible decline in confidence in both elected officials and public institutions. The erosion of public trust is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a range of corrupt practices, such as embezzlement, bribery, and favoritism within governmental processes. As corruption becomes entrenched, citizens perceive a deviation from the principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness that are essential for maintaining trust in political systems. The findings suggest that the cumulative effect of corrupt practices creates a climate of skepticism and disillusionment among the populace.

Furthermore, the research highlights the consequential impact of this erosion of trust on the overall effectiveness of governance. When citizens lose faith in the integrity of their political leaders and institutions, it becomes challenging to foster a collaborative and participatory relationship between the government and the governed. The decline in confidence may manifest in reduced civic engagement, reluctance to comply with governmental initiatives, and, in extreme cases, civil unrest or political instability. This finding serves as a crucial insight for policymakers, emphasizing the imperative of addressing corruption not only as a legal and ethical concern but also as a fundamental threat to the social contract between the government and its citizens. Efforts to rebuild public trust may require comprehensive anti-corruption measures, transparency initiatives, and strategies to demonstrate a commitment to ethical governance.

Corruption Fuels Political Instability

The identified link between corruption and political instability underscores the multifaceted impact of corrupt practices on the broader socio-political landscape. Instances of embezzlement and bribery, when prevalent within political structures, create a climate of discontent and dissatisfaction among the populace. This discontent often finds expression in various forms of political unrest, such as protests and demonstrations, as citizens voice their concerns and opposition to corrupt practices. Moreover, the research indicates that the consequences of corruption extend beyond peaceful protests, potentially leading to more severe outcomes like civil unrest. In extreme cases, widespread corruption can be a destabilizing force that undermines the very foundations of political systems, posing challenges to governance and societal order.

Impact on Economic Development

The research discerns a discernible connection between corrupt practices and hindrances to economic progress within the region. The misappropriation of resources for personal gain, rather than directing them towards public welfare and infrastructure projects, emerges as a significant factor impeding the economic development trajectory. When funds intended for public welfare are siphoned off through corrupt practices, essential services suffer, and infrastructure projects stall. This diversion of resources away from productive and developmental avenues impedes the overall economic advancement of Sub-Saharan African countries.

Furthermore, the study found the exacerbation of economic inequality resulting from corrupt practices. As funds are redirected for personal gain or distributed unequally due to corruption, societal disparities widen. The diversion of resources from essential services and public projects disproportionately affects marginalized communities, contributing to an uneven distribution of wealth and opportunities.

Influence on Democratic Processes

This finding reveals a discernible connection between corrupt practices and the erosion of essential elements of democracy, such as electoral integrity and fair representation. Instances of electoral fraud, vote-buying, and manipulation emerge as key factors that compromise the democratic ideals of fair representation and citizen participation in the political process. Electoral fraud, which includes practices such as ballot tampering and the manipulation of results, compromises the legitimacy of the electoral process. The presence of vote-buying, where individuals exchange votes for material gain, distorts the true expression of citizens'

political will. These corrupt practices collectively undermine the foundational principles of democratic elections, which are designed to reflect the genuine preferences of the electorate.

Moreover, the findings show that corruption can weaken democratic institutions, diminishing their effectiveness in upholding the principles of fair representation and citizen participation. When corruption infiltrates the electoral system, it erodes public trust in the democratic process. Citizens may become disillusioned and disengaged, perceiving that their voices are not genuinely represented in government. This weakening of democratic institutions contributes to a broader erosion of the democratic ethos within the region.

International Perceptions and Foreign Relations

This study found that corruption has far-reaching consequences on international perceptions and diplomatic relations in Sub-Saharan African countries. High levels of corruption have a detrimental impact on how these nations are perceived globally, influencing their diplomatic standing and interactions with the international community. The prevalence of corruption can tarnish the reputation of Sub-Saharan African countries on the global stage. Furthermore, corruption acts as a significant deterrent to foreign investment and cooperation. Investors and international partners may be reluctant to engage with countries where corruption is rampant, as it introduces uncertainties and risks. The findings indicate that the impact extends beyond domestic borders, influencing the region's overall standing and participation in the global community.

Corruption as a Driver of State Capture

The findings show instances where corrupt practices become a driving force behind state capture. This state capture occurs when individuals or groups, often with significant economic or political power, exploit corrupt practices to manipulate key state institutions for their exclusive benefit. State capture emerges as a critical factor undermining the effectiveness of government institutions and contributing to political instability. When state institutions are manipulated for personal gain, their ability to serve the broader public interest is compromised. State capture contributes to a weakening of governance structures, eroding the capacity of institutions to deliver public services and uphold the rule of law.

Furthermore, the study establishes a link between state capture and political instability. As powerful entities manipulate state institutions, the balance of power within the political landscape is disrupted, potentially leading to social unrest, protests, or other forms of political upheaval. The study suggests that addressing corruption and preventing state capture is not only an ethical imperative but a crucial strategy for maintaining political stability and ensuring the effective functioning of government institutions.

CONCLUSION

The intricate interplay between corruption and the stability of political institutions demands a critical understanding that considers both short-term political expediency and the long-term resilience of governance structures. By unraveling these complexities, scholars and policymakers can develop more informed strategies to mitigate the destabilizing effects of corruption and foster sustainable political stability in diverse contexts. Examining the relationship between corruption and political stability reveals significant challenges for governance and developmental efforts. Corrupt practices hinder effective governance by diverting resources away from public goods and services, perpetuating inequality, and impeding economic development. This creates a cyclical pattern where corruption erodes the foundations of political stability, contributing to a vicious cycle of underdevelopment and

political fragility. The findings are particularly pertinent for policymakers and stakeholders involved in efforts to promote political stability. They highlight the importance of addressing corruption not only as an ethical concern but as a critical factor influencing the overall stability of political systems. Strategies aimed at reducing corruption and enhancing transparency may play a pivotal role in mitigating political instability, fostering a more resilient and effective governance framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively mitigate corruption, governments in sub-Saharan African countries should prioritize the implementation of stringent anti-corruption legislation, ensuring that laws include severe penalties for offenders. Simultaneously, there is a need to establish an independent and efficient judiciary to facilitate fair and prompt adjudication of corruption cases. Strengthening institutions and oversight mechanisms is crucial, requiring investments in transparent and accountable bodies, including auditing agencies, ombudsman offices, and anti-corruption entities. Enhancing transparency can be achieved through measures like open budgeting, public procurement reforms, and mandatory financial disclosure for public officials, thereby granting citizens access to crucial information about government activities and expenditures. Cultivating a culture of ethics and integrity is imperative, involving the development and implementation of comprehensive training programs for public officials at all levels. This approach encourages ethical leadership and underscores the significance of public service values, fostering a sense of responsibility among government employees. Finally, whistleblower protection is key, demanding the establishment and enforcement of laws safeguarding those who expose corruption. Confidential reporting mechanisms, alongside incentives and safeguards, should be instituted to encourage individuals to disclose corrupt practices without fear of reprisals.

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