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POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND 'ONE CHANCE' DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper studied political corruption and 'one chance' democracy in Nigeria. It is acknowledged in the work that corruption is a universal disorder present in different dimensions in all modern states. The Nigerian trajectory of corruption is denoted as atypically challenging in the analysis, as corruption is even communally tolerable in the country. Under the template of the elite theory, the paper explored how corruption has engendered in Nigeria, the brand of democracy denotable as one chance democracy. Under this practice, voters are functionally robbed of their votes through vote buying, by corrupt and moneyed politicians. The antics of these political elites are in tandem with the operational bravado of the original one chance practitioners, who use their commercial cabs to rob, maim or kill unsuspecting commuters. Corruption and one chance democracy have accordingly left the citizenry bewildered at best, and invariably endangered as members of a purposeful nation. The paper concludes that by and large, the aboriginal one chance operators will close in on their political elite counterparts for an epic confrontation that would cause the return of the Nigerian state to the path of true democratic ethos.

Keywords: *Political corruption, elite theory, systemic corruption, 'one chance' democracy*

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is undeniably a universal problem found in different degrees in all contemporary societies. It is a global plague implying a monumental loss to governments and taxpayers around the world. Corruption truncates the developmental efforts of national leaderships toiling to provide sufficient services for their citizens. It is among the critical subjects for public policies and one of the major barriers to the progress of emerging nations. Corruption further impairs the quality of life in the already advanced nations. Hence, its eradication or retardation remains one of the crucial global challenges (Locatelli et al, 2017; Zang et al, 2023). It is specifically detrimental in developing nations, where vanished tax revenues weaken efforts by governments to make progress on national economic development plans, development priorities and other emergencies (Meskell, 2021; Minto & Trincanato, 2022; Mungiu, 2006, Rowden & Wang, 2020).

Then it appears as if the Nigerian dimension to this worldwide phenomenon is atypically challenging. Hence, probing corruption in Nigeria is a daunting task. This declaration applies similarly to scholarly efforts and professional crime-fighting probes. Furthermore, even an academic conceptualization of corruption is difficult to achieve. Lay commentators also possess varying viewpoints on the meaning of corruption. However, a widely held notion of corruption is that it borders on fraudulent and questionable conduct by the occupiers of public office. But then, the fraudulent and questionable conducts of the occupiers of non-public offices are excluded from this impression of corruption. Hence, corruption begins to appear like an abhorrent phenomenon with manifold

trajectories. As some researchers are inclined to do, attempting to locate the positive angles of corruption usually sound like bland work.

Nonetheless, corruption is communally tolerable in Nigeria, and that is where the tragedy begins. In contradistinction, robbery and murder are not. Consequently, when citizens are indicted for corruption in the country the official condemnation never translates to socially relevant positions. Culturally adequate tendencies are difficult to eradicate. Wholesale critique of generic corruption in the nation may accordingly remain ineffectual. For corruption research in the country to achieve its intended purposes therefore requires refocusing of research tendencies. Invariably, orthodox classification of corruption may include the following: petty corruption, grand corruption, systemic (endemic) corruption and political corruption and none of these classificatory focuses makes corruption a lesser evil. But narrowing down the research attention to any specific trajectory of corruption provides the opportunity of an empirical inroad through which global corruption issues could be tackled progressively. In this paper therefore, corruption is delimited to the concept of political corruption.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE ELITE THEORY

The origins of elite theory are actually locatable in the works of Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels (Michels, 1915/196; Mosca, 1923/1939; Okeke, 2016; Pareto, 1915/1935). The trio of the "Italian Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, and the German Robert Michels, are easily regarded as the founding fathers of classical elitism" (Damele & Campos, 2022, p.1). C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* also provides an influential bearing to the elite theory (Mills, 1956). Then in explicating the fundamentals of the theory, Hafner-Burton et al. (2013, p.369) have submitted that "elites are broadly defined as the small number of decision makers who occupy the top positions in social and political structures; those who have the highest indices in their branch of authority and exercise significant influence over social and political change". Hafner-Burton et al. (2013, p.369) further assert that "by this operating definition, elites are found in a wide array of activities including business, religious institutions, public interest groups and, of course, elected officials and bureaucrats".

Furthermore, "elites are primed and selected for service in many ways: through the schools they attend, their connections to existing elites, performance on the job, and other factors. Through these priming and selection mechanisms, elites gain the means to exercise significant influence over resources. Political elites control political resources (e.g., regulation and public budgets); media elites control access to sanctioned information sources that can influence public opinion; Hollywood elites control access to the silver screen and the imprimaturs of celebrity" (Hafner-Burton et al., 2013, p.369). Then "these different types of resources can, in turn, affect the many different faces of political power, from the setting of agendas and patterns of thought to control over material resources".

Campati (2022, p.16) elaborates that "elite theory aims to explain in a scientific manner one of the indisputable regularities of human history, that is the fact that, in every age and in every society, a numerically small segment of people tends to concentrate in their own hands, a high quantity of resources and to impose itself on almost all of the population who lack them". In further amplification, Campati (2022, p.16) adds that "clearly, an unequal distribution of the possession and control of resources results in an equally unequal distribution of power". Hence, "the classical elaboration – especially with respect to the political sphere – by Gaetano Mosca expresses this idea, as Mosca underlines how in all social organizations, there are two classes of people: the rulers and the governed. The former are less numerous and capable of monopolizing power, while the latter are more numerous and directed by the first in an arbitrary and violent way" (Campati, 2022, p.16).

Kertzer & Renshon (2022, p.535) demonstrate that "one challenge in the study of political elites is widespread disagreement about who counts as a political elite". They posit that "political scientists have been flexible in their use of the term, applying it to business executives, military officers, professors with doctorates in economics, mixed groups of government and military personnel recruited from executive education programs and elected politicians". According to Kertzer & Renshon (2022, pp.535-536) "there are roughly three different ways in which elites have been conceptualized in the literature, categorized as occupational, compositional, and cognitive approaches. Occupational models conceptualize political elites as actors whose institutional roles afford them higher levels of influence over public policy: prime ministers, legislators, civil servants, bureaucrats, diplomats, military officers, and so on. In this view, it is less that elites have unique traits, and more that they happen to occupy unique roles" Kertzer & Renshon (2022, p.536) further posit that "in contrast, compositional models conceptualize elites as a distinctive class that can be identified via demographic categories, and focus on the social and economic characteristics that define them. Political elites tend to be wealthier, more educated, older, and more likely to be male than the population at large; in Western contexts, they are also more likely to

be white. Third are cognitive models, which emphasize elites' possession of a distinctive constellation of cognitive traits, sometimes conceptualized as domain-specific expertise or experience".

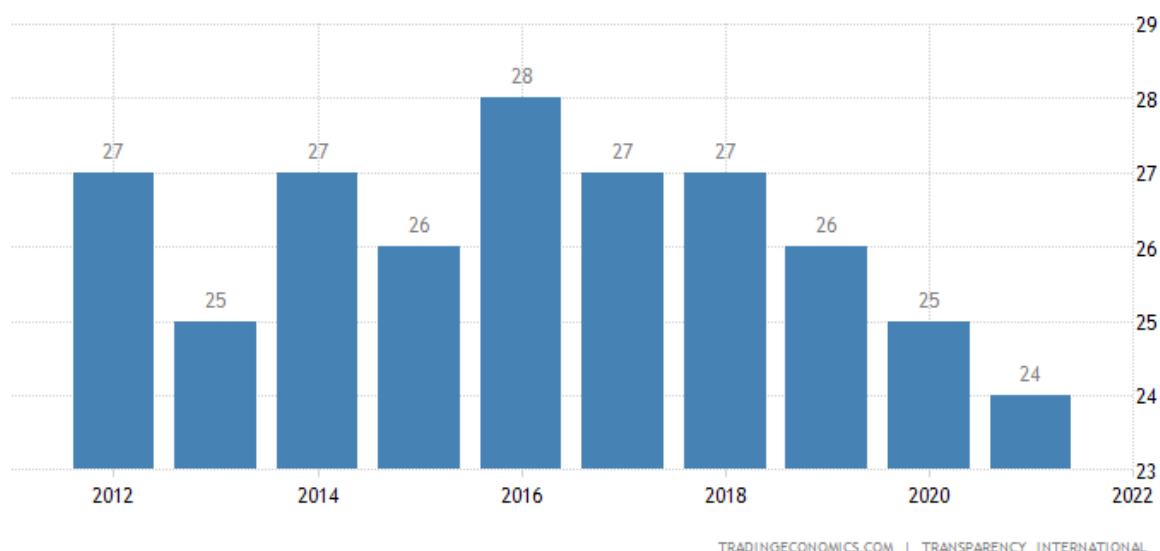
In the application of elite theoretical framework of analysis to this study, the poser of Grossman & Slough (2022, p.132) is reechoed as they ask: "When do governments deliver outputs that are responsive to citizen preferences?" The paper is invariably asking: when do political elites consider citizens' presence (the incidence of the non-elites) in creating political outputs. In the final analysis, all societies are composed of the elite and non-elites. Stornaiolo (2022, p.13) concurs by positing that "in the realm of elite theory, it has been proven that all kinds of organizations, all kinds of orders in society, from the most minuscule and simple, such as the nuclear family, to the most structurally sophisticated and complex such as the state itself, has a group of leaders that compose its ruling class". So the elites exist because of their non-elite counterpoise. Invariably, the existence of the non-elites matters.

ELUCIDATING POLITICAL CORRUPTION

A specific trajectory of trouble that has immensely troubled the universe is political corruption. It borders on the transgressions of the political class, the inordinate ambitions of the class members and their generic tendencies towards dishonesty. Political corruption refers to the breaking of the rules of political engagement by leaders in order to obtain undue advantage for themselves and others. Targeted gains may be immediately material or strategically positional but ultimately aimed at garnering undue benefits in the material sense. Morris (1991) sees political corruption as the dishonest utilization of public power to promote and profit from a private activity. Oghuvbu (2021, p.251) opines that "political corruption occurs when decision makers, policymakers, and those who implement the laws participate in the types of unethical activities mentioned within the domain of leadership and the exercise of government power". In other words, asserts, Oghuvbu (2021, p.251) "when laws and regulations are made for the benefit of politicians and their self-interests, corruption exists". The propelling force of political corruption is egocentricity. Its antithesis is selflessness. So altruism in political leadership is the albatross of political corruption. Consequently, confronting political corruption successfully becomes feasible only when the crime fighters are not prima facie criminals.

POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Figure 1: Nigeria Corruption Index by Transparency International (2021)



Source: Trading Economics (2022).

A prominent component of the generic corruption in the Nigerian state is political corruption which possesses as synonym, political elite thievery. Figure 1 clearly indicates that "Nigeria scored 24 points out of 100 on the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International. The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. A country or territory's score indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)" (Trading Economics, 2022). Hence, for the decade spanning 2012 to 2021 Nigeria sank to its lowest ebb of 24 points in 2021 with the possibilities for further deterioration in the coming years. An indicator to the likelihood of additional future degeneration is that boldly on yearly bases, the thieving public sector actors dismiss

the report of Transparency International as hogwash. Such a scenario vividly proves that the elite public sector players are not enamored of corruption-reduction plans in the polity. Otherwise, the elite actors would have been making on yearly bases too, pronouncements that denote commitment towards reversing the sleazy trend in the state. The previous year, the report was dismissed as sensational and baseless (Premium Times, 2021). For the extant year, the Minister for Justice who doubles as Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) in Nigeria, Mr. Abubakar Malami, posited that “the global anti-corruption body (Transparency International) “lacked the basis upon which it could rank Nigeria” (Ejekwonyilo, 2022). Corruption accordingly continues to segue itself into the central political culture of the country and prime national leadership tendencies.

THEORIZING DEMOCRACY

Encyclopaedia Britannica (2022, p.1) establishes that “democracy, literally means, rule by the people and the term is derived from the Greek *dēmokratia*, which was coined from *dēmos* (“people”) and *kratos* (“rule”) in the middle of the 5th century BCE, to denote the political systems then existing in some Greek city-states, notably Athens”. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2022, p.8) “although it is tempting to assume that democracy was created in one particular place and time (most often identified as Greece about the year 500 BCE) evidence suggests that democratic government, in a broad sense, existed in several areas of the world well before the turn of the 5th century”. Furthermore, “it is plausible to assume that democracy in one form or another arises naturally in any well-bounded group, such as a tribe, if the group is sufficiently independent of control by outsiders to permit members to run their own affairs and if a substantial number of members, such as tribal elders, consider themselves about equally qualified to participate in decisions about matters of concern to the group as a whole” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022, pp.8-9). Therefore, “this assumption has been supported by studies of nonliterate tribal societies, which suggest that democratic government existed among many tribal groups during the thousands of years when human beings survived by hunting and gathering. To these early humans, democracy such as it was practiced, might well have seemed the most “natural” political system” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022, p.9).

Invariably, “when the lengthy period of hunting and gathering came to an end and humans began to settle in fixed communities, primarily for agriculture and trade, the conditions that favour popular participation in government seem to have become rare. Greater inequalities in wealth and military power between communities, together with a marked increase in the typical community’s size and scale, encouraged the spread of hierarchical and authoritarian forms of social organization. As a result, popular governments among settled peoples vanished, to be replaced for thousands of years by governments based on monarchy, despotism, aristocracy, or oligarchy, each of which came to be seen—at least among the dominant members of these societies—as the most natural form of government (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022, p.10). Then, “about 500 BCE, conditions favourable to democracy reappeared in several places, and a few small groups began to create popular governments. Primitive democracy, one might say, was reinvented in more advanced forms. The most crucial developments occurred in two areas of the Mediterranean, Greece and Rome” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022, p.10).

Democracy has since become the singsong governance scheme of the liberal world order. This is so because, while the Western arch-missionaries of democracy propagate it as the ultimate of governance systems, the arch-messengers of illiberality view democracy as sheer governance disorder. However, if properly understood, democracy should not breed such divisions between the principal propagators and the main opposers. Democracy is essentially about the people and their centrality in governance structures. The origin of the democratic idea in governance is indisputably traceable to the Greek city states as most notably illustrated usually by the Athenian standard of democracy. According to Ober (2008, p.69) “democracy first emerged in a very extensive ecology of about 1000 city-states geographically centered on the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Those city-states (*poleis*) shared a language and core cultural characteristics, but differed in size, government, and economics”.

Citing Grigsby (2009), Sule (2021, pp.168-169) asserts that “democracy entails a style of governance in which the leaders together with the followers are linked up or the people’s influence determines the direction of public policy”. Similarly, Fagbadebo & Ile (2023, p.3) submit that “democratic tenets rest on freedom and equality of the people’s participation”. According to Fagbadebo & Ile (2023, p.3) “the various transformations in the practice of democracy since its initial practice in the Greek city-state of Athens, as the rule of the people, have retained these core elements that prioritize the people as the nucleus of democratic society”. Consequently, “from the equal right of participation by free citizens in person, associated with direct democracy, to the indirect participation through elected representatives, and Huntington’s (1991, 1993) waves of democracy, the democratic practice has evolved as a global force dictating the governing of society”.

In Africa however, the continental divide to which the Nigerian state belongs, democracy as “global force dictating the governing of society” seems to be characterized by endless discontents. In the viewpoint of Zamfir

(2021, p.1) “two sets of reasons account for the fragility of democracies in sub-Saharan Africa - those that are extrinsic and those that are intrinsic to political and institutional settings. The first include low socio-economic development, conflict and insecurity; the second include weak institutions, lack of judicial independence, manipulation of electoral laws and constitutional norms, as well as serious limitations of civil and political rights. In practice, authoritarian regimes have become skilled at using a façade of legality to legitimize their grip on power”. Specifically in Nigeria, USAID (2022, p.1) summarizes that “there are roadblocks to a strong democracy in the country at all levels of government. Conflict, triggered by political competition and communal, ethnic, religious or resource allocation rivalries, poses a major threat to democracy. Corruption pervades the daily lives of Nigerians. Many government institutions do not adequately engage with citizens or the private sector and lack the capacity to carry out their mandates. Further, civil society lacks both the capacity and the resources to effectively engage with government and advocate for change”. And that is the accurate account of the state of affairs in the Nigerian nation, with what is remaining under the tasks of this paper being to establish how the appalling scenarios are related to one chance democracy.

EXPLICATING THE ‘ONE CHANCE’ CONCEPT

Within the specific Nigerian geographical and sociocultural location, Yakubu (2021, p.3) highlights that “one chance is a term referring to a form of robbery in which assailants lure unsuspecting victims into their vehicle, pretending to be heading to a particular destination, only to rob and afterwards kill or abandon their victim to fate”. Kenechi (2021) explains that in Nigeria, one chance is a type of robbery in which people are lured into commercial vehicles whose passengers are robbers, after which they’ll be stripped of their valuables”. The city of Lagos is the commercial nerve center of Nigeria. The metropolis of Lagos also previously served as the national capital of the country. It undoubtedly harbours the good, the bad and the ugly, and is a logical habitat for sundry denizens. Nigeria’s multiethnic composition equally coalesces into a riotous amalgam in Lagos as the location comparatively accommodates peoples from all the multifarious ethnic colorations in the country. Invariably, there is this characteristic pressure and urgency which marks the Lagos habitation and movement. Sufficiency has never been attributed to anything that has to be shared by the Lagos residents. Transportation remains marked by inadequacies in the Lagos municipality. So when there is only “one chance” remaining in the commercial vehicle, the Lagos resident rushes for it uncontrollably. The bad and the ugly elements in the society have also cashed in on this scenario to rob and even kill some unsuspecting commuters. Hence, the one chance victim falls for his or her intense pursuit of a legitimate objective. The reference to legitimacy in this instance begins to allude to governmental validity as possibly epitomized by democracy.

ELUCIDATING ‘ONE CHANCE’ DEMOCRACY

Ayodeji (2021) had commented on one-chance leadership in Nigeria. According to Ayodeji “one-chance leaders, are akin to kidnapers of innocent commuters as operators of the country’s democracy and government pretend to be working on behalf of the people but in typical one-chance fashion, they get power for themselves”. It is then the one chance leaders that midwife one chance democracy. One chance leaders serve as gatekeepers of one chance democracy. The colonial master (Britain) granted independence to Nigeria in 1960 and six years after (in January 1966) some one chance military officers toppled the government of the newly independent state in a bloody military coup. A counter coup by another set of military personnel in July 1966 and the surrounding issues to the first and second military coups eventually led to a civil war that was fought from 1967 to 1970. From the end of the war till May 1999, the one chance military politicians and their civilian counterparts alternated in managing the affairs of the state in Nigeria. The military would hand over to civilians and eventually topple such civilian governments as they overthrew the regimes headed by their military colleagues. In 1999 however, the military politicians midwived the current one chance democracy in the country.

In archetypical one chance standard, the post-military democratic dispensation in the country continues to be characterized by the personalization of power by one chance politicians. Under such scenarios, democracy is bizarrely “practiced as government of my people, by our people and against their people and the central element of the democratic process is exclusion” (Okeke, 2014, p.9). Excluded citizens are still informed that other alternatives do not exist to this brand of democracy. So there is only “one chance” to the democratic Eldorado for the nation. The defining attribute of the democratic process in the one chance regards is the conduct of putative elections. Under this practice, citizens are functionally robbed of their votes through vote buying by corrupt moneyed politicians (Onuoha & Okafor, 2020). The prolonged period of military rule has disposed the people towards accepting the one chance conditions of the democratic orthodoxy in Nigeria under which human lives have lost value (Kolawole, 2022). Those who are not killed by terrorists, highway robbers and kidnapers, are

easily decimated by curable diseases because healthcare facilities in the country are either totally decrepit or simply nonexistent.

The propelling element of the one chance phenomenon in Nigeria's democratic culture is of course political corruption which has become synonymous with politics in the country. It needs to be noted that political corruption is not a novel issue in Nigeria. Pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras in the Nigerian state have all witnessed incidences of corruption in varying degrees (Ojo, 2021). The critical question borders on why the sleazy political trend has failed to recede and how it has become interwoven with the leadership oblation of one chance democracy in the country. Sanni (2022) narrates that "despite the constant media attention given to the arrest of politically corrupt politicians in modern Nigeria, their trials frequently go poorly, and convictions have been rare even in egregious cases". The poverty and underdevelopment wounds the one chance democracy promoters inflict on the country have accordingly continued to fester.

Democracy thus remains elite denominated in the country, while Fagbadebo & Ile (2023, p.1) aptly assert that "the priority given to the people is the nerve of democracy". Furthermore, Fagbadebo & Ile (2023, p.3) submits that "even with limited government, the people, whether through direct or indirect participation, remain central to democratic practice. And the democratic process has meaning when its outcomes cater to the needs of citizens. Thus, democracy is all about governance". However, all this could be for other climes. In Nigeria, the people factor is at the periphery of democracy. Commuters in the democracy vehicle are expected to embark on the putative democratic journey in one chance style. Hence, they are easily thrown off the moving state transport at the will and caprice of the elite drivers. Essentially, the understanding of democracy in the country is inherently flawed. In Ober (2006) the eminent American classical political theorist and historian of ancient (Josiah Ober) demonstrates that democracy originally referred to the capacity to do things not majority rule. According to Ober (2006, p.1) "in origin, democracy is, of course, Greek, a composite of demos and kratos and since demos can be translated as "the people" (qua "native adult male residents of a polis") and kratos as "power," democracy has a root meaning of "the power of the people but power in what sense?" Ober (2006, p.1) further posits:

In modernity, democracy is often construed as being concerned, in the first instance, with a voting rule for determining the will of the majority. The power of the people is thus the authority to decide matters by majority rule. If democracy as a political system is reducible to a decision mechanism based on a voting rule, and if that voting rule is inherently flawed as a decision mechanism, then democracy is inherently flawed as a political system. Reducing democracy to a voting rule arguably elides much of the value and potential of democracy.

In further elucidations, Ober (2008, p.70) suggests that democracy is more plausibly denotable as "the empowered people" rather than simply "the power of the people". Incidentally, "the empowered people" in the Nigerian context are the political elite. The one chance type of democracy as practiced in Nigeria is squarely hoisted on the voting rule standard in its hollowness. Empowering of the people is not part of the considerations. Instead of multiparty elections constituting a particular aspect of the democratic tendencies in the nation, it has become the ultimate purpose. Consequently, as long as periodic elections are conducted and putative winners are announced, democracy is claimed to be on course in the country by the political elite. It does not matter to the politicians that voter apathy is on the ascendancy in the same state and that what is obtainable in the country is validly describable as democracy without development (Emegwa, 2023).

According to Okafor et al. (2022, p.84) "the increasing manifestation of voter apathy in the last two decades of Nigeria's democracy leads to a poor democratization process and governance failures in the Nigerian project and has also promoted a condition in which individuals still remain more powerful than institutions". The one chance phenomenon is truly conducted by strong individuals. And so, Grossman & Slough (2022, p.133) asks: "When do politicians pursue policies or allocate resources in a way that coincides with their constituents' interests?" Findings of this study lead to the response that it is when the political elite are not one chance democrats. Nations do not grope in darkness in perpetuity. The original one chance operators in the country are spreading their dragnets and will eventually engage in epic battles with their political opposite numbers for the soul of the nation. The national dividend of that envisioned battle or series of battles will be democratic sanity.

CONCLUSION

The paper interrogated the phenomena of political corruption and 'one chance' democracy in Nigeria. Corruption is denoted in the paper as a universal problem present in different degrees in all contemporary states. The Nigerian brand of corruption is underscored in the work as atypically challenging. Political corruption and public sector corruption in general are even communally tolerable in Nigeria. The political elite are the practitioners of one chance democracy in the nation. Under this practice, they functionally rob the voters of their votes through vote buying and provide them with no public services in return. The modus operandi of these political elites agrees with the operational audacity of the original one chance operators who use their commercial

cabs to rob, maim or kill unsuspecting commuters. Corruption and one chance democracy have accordingly left non-elite Nigerian citizens bewildered and invariably endangered as members of a purposeful nation state. The thesis of the study is that at the long run, the original one chance operators in the country will close in on their political elite colleagues for an epic confrontation, at the end of which sanity would return to Nigeria's democratic path and the generic polity.

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